

ABSTRACT

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FOR LAND IN NORTHEASTERN BRAZIL,
1955 - 1985

Sarah R. Sarzynski, Doctor of Philosophy, 2008

Directed By: Barbara Weinstein,
Department of History, New York University
University of Maryland, College Park

Drawing from Edward Said, Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Junior has argued that through a repetition of texts and images, Northeastern Brazil was “nordestinizado,” or turned into an imagined area of misery, violence, folklore, fanaticism, and rebellion that became the Other of the modern, urban center-south of Brazil. My research builds on Albuquerque’s arguments about the construction of *o Nordeste* in the twentieth century by situating them in the milieu of political and cultural debates that attempted to redefine Northeastern Brazil during the Cold War. Rural social movements (associated with the Catholic Church, the Communist Party, and the *Ligas Camponesas*), large landowners, filmmakers and intellectuals, popular poets, U.S. and Brazilian politicians and journalists, and Brazilian military officers proposed projects to change the structures that they saw as perpetuating regional inequalities. To gain support for their political projects, these social, political and cultural movements appropriated regional historical symbols and narratives, imbuing them

with new meanings. In doing so, they sought to redefine regional identity, and to a certain extent, also looked to redefine national and Third World identity.

During the Cold War, identity expanded to becoming a product of local, national and transnational discussions, facilitated by the expansion of film as a medium of mass culture. The debates over the meaning of regional historical symbols and regional identity in Northeastern Brazil are at once an exaggerated and exemplary microcosm of Cold War political and cultural struggles in Latin America and in the Third World. The characters in the story had counterparts in other countries, and the setting was one of the most socially unequal areas in the world espousing all of the problems and possibilities of impoverished areas during the Cold War. The struggles also occurred at a key moment in Cold War history in Latin America: the era of the Cuban Revolution. But, the Northeast was not a blank slate for Cold War policies; in fact, the region had entrenched cultural symbols and historical narratives that composed the framework for the debates over regional identity.

HISTORY, IDENTITY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR LAND IN NORTHEASTERN
BRAZIL, 1955 – 1985

By

Sarah R. Sarzynski

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Advisory Committee:
Professor Barbara Weinstein, Chair
Professor Mary Kay Vaughan
Professor Daryle Williams
Professor Saverio Giovacchini
Professor Phylis Peres

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When the [Peasant] Leagues aroused worldwide interest in the early 1960s, foreign observers...were quick to assume that “revolution” in the Northeast could ignite upheaval in the rest of the country, to view the Leagues in Cold War terms, and to stress comparisons with the Cuban Revolution. But despite its sugar monoculture, the Northeast is not Cuba. And the relevant question at the time was not whether Francisco Julião was another Castro, but whether he could become another Padre Cicero or Antonio Conselheiro.

Joseph Page, *The Revolution That Never Was*, 1972

I was drawn to the story of the Ligas Camponesas or Peasant Leagues after happening upon Joseph Page’s exciting tale, *The Revolution That Never Was*. Page’s version of the story was almost too fantastic to imagine that it could be history. I turned the pages with astonishment and laughter, disbelief and incredulity. At the time, I felt fairly well informed about the history of Latin America during the Cold War. I had taken many university classes on Latin America, worked with Guatemalan survivors of torture, and celebrated in the Plaza Italia when Pinochet was arrested in England. But, the “revolution that never was” seemed to be the quintessential story of Cold War revolutionary hope and repressive reality. All of the Cold War actors and more were piled into the pages: On the left, revolutionary peasants and a Castro-like leader, Communists and radical Catholics, and a governor who smoked American cigarettes to the tune of “Americans are for burning.” On the right, gun-toting landowners, US officials who seemed ignorant and imperialistic with their poorly executed Alliance for Progress programs, and the U.S.-backed Brazilian armed forces that arrested, tortured and killed. This was all set against the backdrop of an area painted to be one of the most inequitable areas of the world, “the next Cuba,” the Sicily of Latin

America, a locale filled with religious fanatics, backlands bandits and roaming troubadours. And yet, I had never heard of any of this before. I had read novels of the Northeast and seen all the Cinema Novo films, but this “revolution” remained a mystery. So the story provoked my curiosity.

The history of rural social movements in Northeastern Brazil is a relatively well-researched topic in the field of Northeastern Brazilian studies. Scholars have examined the organizational structure of the different movements, the involvement of the U.S. government, the material successes and failures of the movements, the stories of the dictatorship from leaders and the political objectives of the rural social movements.¹ But, a number of issues complicate the historiography. For one, much

¹ Joseph Page, *The Revolution That Never Was* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1972); Gerrit Huizer, *The Revolutionary Potential of Peasants in Latin America* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1972); Cynthia Hewitt, “Brazil: The Peasant Movement of Pernambuco, 1961-1964,” in *Latin American Peasant Movements*, ed. Henry A. Landsberger (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969); Bailby, *Brésil: Pays clef*; Jamil Almansur Haddad, *Revolução cubana e revolução brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Civilização Brasileira, 1961); Antônio Callado, *Os Industriais da seca e os “Galileus” de Pernambuco. (Aspectos da luta pela reforma agrária no Brasil.)* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1960); Florencia Mallon, “Peasants and Rural Laborers in Pernambuco, 1955-1964,” *Latin American Perspectives* 5, no. 4 (Autumn, 1978): 49-70; Clodomir Moraes, “Peasant Leagues in Brazil,” in *Agrarian Problems and Peasant Movements in Latin America*. Rodolfo Stavenhagen, ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1970): 453-501; Caio Prado Júnior, *A revolução brasileira* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1966); Aspásia Alcântara de Camargo, “Brésil nord-est: Mouvements paysans et crise populiste” Thesis: University of Paris, 1973; Peter Flynn, *Brazil: A Political Analysis* (London: Ernest Benn, 1978); Francisco de Assis Lemos Souza, *Nordeste: O vietnã que não houve. Ligas Camponesas e o golpe de 64.* (João Pessoa: Universidade Federal de Paraíba, 1996); Luciana de Barros Jaccoud, *Movimentos sociais e crise política em Pernambuco, 1955-1968* (Recife: Editora Massangana, 1990); Bernadete Wrubleski Aued, *A vitória dos vencidos: Partido Comunista Brasileiro e Ligas Camponesas, 1955-1964* (Florianópolis: Editora da UFSC, 1985); Fernando Antônio Azevedo, *As Ligas Camponesas* (São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 1982); Elide de Rugai Bastos, *As Ligas Camponesas* (Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 1984); Vandeck Santiago, *Francisco Julião: Perfil parlamentar século XX* (Recife: Assembleia Legislativa do Estado de Pernambuco, 2001); Paulo

of the historiography is strongly influenced by Cold War politics. Scant empirical data exists and this information is oftentimes flawed and contradictory because of the politically charged atmosphere in the early 1960s and because of the violence and repression of Ligas leaders and members after the 1964 coup. Second, the historiography on rural social activism in Brazil often privileges the position of the Brazilian Communist Party and particularly the movements of ULTAB and CONTAG in the South. And, third, the two main works on the Ligas Camponesas cited by most scholars – Fernando Antônio Azevedo’s *As Ligas Camponesas* Elide de Rugai Bastos’s *As Ligas Camponesas* –were published in the early 1980s. Both books present narratives of the Ligas and the other rural social movements but much of what these authors accept as “fact” deserves to be questioned and analyzed.

When I first considered doing a historical study of rural workers in Northeastern Brazil during the Cold War, I became increasingly skeptical of the feasibility of such a project because of limitations of the existent sources as well as the difficulties in interviewing former Ligas members. As the oral histories conducted in the late 1970s and early 1980s show, the experience of the coup and the years of the dictatorship influenced people’s perceptions and memories of the Ligas. Likewise, conducting archival research on the Ligas also revealed the politically charged atmosphere: the accounts of events could be completely different depending on who crafted and disseminated the report. Furthermore, the Ligas members

Menezes, *Sindicalismo X repressão* (Recife: Nordestal, 1983); Anthony Pereira, *The End of the Peasantry: The Rural Labor Movement in Northeast Brazil, 1961-1988* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997); Antonio Torres Montenegro, “Ligas Camponesas e sindicatos rurais em tempo de revolução,” *O Brasil Republicano*: 241-271.

themselves rarely appeared in any of the sources I could locate. Most of the archival material focused on leaders, on armed conflicts, court cases, political discourse, and ephemeral cultural material. But instead of dismissing the research project as unworkable, I found a way to analyze the struggles of the Cold War in Northeastern Brazil without necessarily having to judge what was accurate or erroneous in the sources, a task that I had come to regard as impossible.

Instead, I put the stories in the sources together to illustrate the dialogic process of how a diverse network of social, cultural and political actors tried to reshape regional identity from 1955 to 1964. And, to do this I examined a broad set of sources, including mainstream and alternative media publications, secret police files, film and archival information about films on the Northeast, *literatura de cordel* (popular pamphlet poetry), theater productions, novels and scientific reports, theses and published conference reports, rural museum libraries and archives, oral histories, political speeches, US media and films on the Northeast, US consular and diplomatic reports, and Brazilian and US congressional reports. To explore how the struggle for land influenced people's understanding of regional identity, I looked far and wide into multiple sources looking at how such documentation defined Northeastern Brazil and Nordestinos. And, in the course of conducting research, a few key themes and symbols repeatedly surfaced: the narrative of slavery and abolition, cangaceiros or backlands bandits, Northeastern religion and fanaticism, and poverty and modernization.

What I discovered in the course of my research was that the story of the Ligas fit into a broader trope of regional identity. The Northeast has often been depicted as

a feudal area where subaltern struggles have been destined to fail, doomed to continually repeat the tragic history of short-lived conflict suffocated by violent acts of state repression. Rural men and women have been portrayed as passive, messianic, irrational, and animal-like in their constant struggle for survival. As Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Júnior has argued, through a repetition of texts and images, the Brazilian Northeast was “nordestinizado,” or turned into an imagined area of misery, violence, folklore, fanaticism, and rebellion that became the Other of the modern, urban center-south of Brazil.² The tragic plotline seemed to fit somewhere between what Eviatar Zerubavel describes as a deterministic historical narrative and a “circles and rhymes” narrative, which “envision[s] things as being trapped, like in *Groundhog Day*, in some eternal present.”³ And even though the tragic story seems determined to repeat itself perpetually in the Northeast, the other characteristic of the plot is that the struggles are “forgotten” after being violently repressed, entombed in an unmarked grave somewhere in the vast backlands (sertão), with no survivors remaining to continue the struggle.

My work examines a key example of the Northeastern trope to show how the story line could function as a narrative of resistance and a narrative of the status quo. To gain support for their political projects in the 1950s and 1960s, a diverse group of social actors appropriated regional historical symbols and narratives, imbuing them with new meanings. On the one hand, the Ligas Camponesas used stories and images about slavery and abolition to bolster their demands for agrarian reform and their

² Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Júnior, *A invenção do Nordeste e outras artes* (Recife: Cortez Editora; Fundação Joaquim Nabuco, Editora Massangana, 1996).

³ Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 17.

fight against rural violence. Brazilian military officials and large landowners, on the other hand, effectively compared Francisco Julião, the leader of the Ligas Camponesas, to Antonio Conselheiro, the leader of Canudos, to legitimize the need to repress the rural social movements for the sake of national security. Through the battles that took place over the symbols, it is possible to see the struggle for power over the dominant ideas of the Northeast, popular notions of the Northeast, and all the hybridities in-between. By examining the struggles over the symbols of regional identity in Brazil it is also possible to understand the limitations of historical reconstruction. This is to say, as Stuart Hall argues about what he calls “trans-coding,” appropriating the meaning of a symbol does not necessarily displace previously held meanings.

My understanding of identity derives from Stuart Hall, among others, as Hall has argued that, “Identity [is] a ‘movable feast’ – formed and transformed constantly in how we are represented or interpreted in the cultural systems that surround us. It is defined historically, not biologically. The subject takes on different identities at different times.”⁴ While identities are never fixed, at the same time, a push exists to naturalize identities, such as those related to sexuality, race, nationalism, or regionalism. These processes are “constructed on the back of a recognition of some common identification or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation.”⁵ In the 1950s and 60s, the Ligas Camponesas entered a struggle for

⁴ Stuart Hall, *A identidade cultural na pós-modernidade* (Rio: DP & A, 2004), 12.

⁵ Stuart Hall, “Introduction: Who Needs ‘Identity’?” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 2.

redefining regional and national identity. In addition to facing the challenge of the “fragmented” identities present in any society, Julião and the Ligas had to deal with the entrenched constructions of Northeastern Brazil. These naturalized assumptions defined *o Nordeste* by its traditions and its adversity to change, by its “contrasts” or inequalities and its *coronéis* (rural political bosses), by religious fanaticism and violence, by poverty, misery, and backwardness. What is clear is that Francisco Julião, the Ligas, and other groups and individuals were involved in the political processes to change the meanings of this regional identity and to construct a new regional and national culture, placing the rural population at the center. But, in this process, Julião and many other social actors also reinforced certain representations of regional identity, making it possible for the Ligas to be depicted historically as a regional movement.

The first five chapters of this study discuss the major historic symbols and narratives used by the principal social actors in Northeastern Brazil from the 1950s to the 1970s: poverty and modernization, slavery and abolition, the *cangaceiro*, and messianic movements. Although my analysis focuses more heavily on how the Ligas Camponesas appropriated these symbols and narratives, the chapters also address how other actors used or contested these symbols. For the obvious reason that many of the social movements did not survive the 1964 coup, these chapters concentrate more heavily on the pre-1964 era, but when possible, I extend the discussion to what happens to these representations after the coup. Chapter Two examines the issue of regionalism in greater detail describing the conventional understanding of *o Nordeste* as well as the ways that the major social actors recreated Nordestino identity during

the Cold War. This chapter engages with the historiography and theoretical debates on regionalism versus nationalism to show how and why “Third World” regions became key areas for Cold War political struggles. The third chapter looks at the issue of modernization and poverty, describing how plans and projects for “evolution or revolution” created and strengthened certain ideas of the Nordeste. Discourses and policies associated with Modernization theory influenced policies, discourses and strategies for combating the problems associated with Third World regions, underdevelopment broadly defined. In this chapter, I show how politicians and intellectuals located an exemplary figure of modernity in Northeastern history as a model for development projects.

Chapter Four examines how social movements, popular poets, and filmmakers used the narrative of slavery, abolition, and run-away slave communities (*quilombos*) to justify the struggle for land and to depict Nordestinos. This chapter examines racial identities and politics in Brazil, raising issues of how these groups dealt with the dominant belief in racial democracy in the Northeast. Chapter Five looks at the symbol of the *cangaceiro*, or backlands bandit, and how this historical figure was appropriated as a guerilla warrior, an autochthonous rebel and martyr of Northeastern Brazil, and a figure that was also associated with criminality, feudalism and violence. The sixth chapter examines religion and specifically the place of the historical narratives of messianic movements as a method both to mobilize and de-legitimize the struggle for land. This chapter also looks at how Catholic priests entered into the struggle for land, before and after the 1964 coup. The final chapter, or epilogue, jumps forward to the point at which the Ligas Camponesas became a memory and a

historical symbol of struggle. Since this historical construction of the Ligas oftentimes contrasts greatly with the sources on the Ligas from the 1950s and 60s, I have chosen to use these narratives and representations to show how a new political era imbues the history and memory of the Ligas with different meanings. By examining scholarship on the Ligas, regionally-based films, and oral histories, this chapter explains how the Ligas were re-conceived as a regional and national symbol and narrative.

The question guiding my dissertation is not whether the Ligas failed or succeeded in their quest to create a new vision of the Nordeste or the Brazilian nation and its *povo*. The Ligas may have been deemed illegal after the coup of 1964, but this does not mean that they “failed” in all of their objectives. The point of my dissertation is to examine this period of contestation in Northeastern Brazil. Through the key historic symbols and narratives used by these actors, it is possible to discuss the battles that took place during this period to reshape national and regional identity. A study of the struggles of the 1950s and 60s explodes the narrative of Northeastern Brazil as a region chained to its past, unable to change. At the same time, it elucidates the political positions of the major social actors in these struggles, providing a historical analysis of this period. Such a focus also explains why the Ligas were construed and historicized as a regional – and not a national – struggle. An analysis of these battles over identity sheds light on Brazilian national politics during the Cold War, helping to explain the major changes of this period such as the military coup of 1964. It also shows how these battles were re-enacted in the final years of the

dictatorship (1979-1985) and in more recent local efforts to construct an official history of the Ligas Camponesas from the position of the participants.

Political Map of Brazil and o Nordeste During the Cold War

President Juscelino Kubitschek's 1955 presidential campaign promise of "fifty years of progress in five," produced a politics of development, largely concentrated on industry in urban areas.⁶ Brasília, the so-called "Capital of Hope" was the symbol of the newly modernized, urban Brazil. A federal politics of industrial development was reflected locally, as in the 1958 election of industrialist Cid Sampaio as governor of the state of Pernambuco. Sampaio was elected without the usual support of the Pernambucan landowning elite,⁷ whose main economic base – sugarcane production – was contracting in the face of declining international prices for sugar. While the landowning class remained the regional ruling elite, their position had been weakened by the national focus on the development of industry, and in relation to more modern sugar production in the Center-South states, such as São Paulo.⁸ Many Northeastern landowners made up for their lost profits by raising the rent they collected from their

⁶ Peter Flynn, *Brazil: A Political Analysis* (London: Westview Press, 1978), 190-191. The most flagrant symbol of this policy was the construction of Brasília. The first stage of development or modernization of Brazil focused on industrialization in urban centers and the second stage was supposed to prioritize rural development.

⁷ According to Joseph Page, Cid Sampaio wanted to raise the standard of living of the poor in Pernambuco in order to create a consumer market. Page, 55.

⁸ Sugar exports dropped from 462,000 tons in 1955 to 184,000 tons in 1956. United States: Department of Agriculture. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Service. *Sugar: World Supply and Distribution 1954/55 – 1973/74*. Statistical Bulletin no. 562, (Washington D.C.: General Printing Office, October 1976). Most of the sugar production in the Northeast was for export according to legislation of the Instituto de Álcool e do Açúcar (IAA) in order to create greater equity between the Northeastern and Center-South economies.

foreiros (subsistence farmers who paid rent and a certain amount of unpaid labor to the landowner).⁹

In 1958, a drought struck the Northeast, creating a new surge in migration to the coastal cities and to other regions of Brazil.¹⁰ This migration of Northeasterners to the cities and the southern states of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro caused politicians to worry about how best to control this migration. Studies on the “drought industry” found DNOCS (*Departamento nacional das obras contra as secas*; National Department of Works Against Droughts) was incapable of solving the problems related to droughts in the Northeast.¹¹ In 1959, SUDENE (Superintendência do desenvolvimento do Nordeste; Superintendency for the Development of the Northeast) was created both to address the problems of the droughts and to stimulate industrial development in the Northeast. Directed by the eminent economist Celso Furtado, SUDENE was seen as the “hope” for the Northeast: a program that would modernize the Northeast by bringing industrial development and jobs to its poverty-stricken inhabitants. This poverty could be seen in both urban and rural areas, and by the late 1950s, Northeast Brazil had the worst rural inequality in Brazil and in the

⁹ Interview with Zezé de Galiléia in *O Estado de São Paulo* (São Paulo) 8 August 1961. “All of a sudden the landowner raised our rent. We couldn’t pay more. We refused to pay more.”

¹⁰ The drought of 1958 affected most of the regions of Northeast Brazil. Another drought affected the area in 1961/62. In between periods of drought, floods often damaged crops and houses.

¹¹ DNOCS and the “drought industry” found that the money spent to prevent the misery caused by droughts in the Northeast was used to support politicians and projects to benefit the land-owning elite instead of projects that benefited the lower-class who the droughts effected more drastically. The large landowners also benefited monetarily through irrigation programs since they were funded to implement the systems on their own lands. Antônio Callado, *Os industriais da seca e os “Galileus” de Pernambuco (Aspectos da luta pela reforma agrária no Brasil)*. (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Civilização Brasileira, 1960).

Americas. Recife, the capital of Pernambuco, was labeled the fourth-worst city in the world, outranked only by three African cities, in terms of poverty and inequality. The ownership of land was highly unequal, with very few wealthy landowners owning most of the land and the majority of the impoverished population owning little or no land.¹²

In terms of world politics, the Cuban Revolution in 1959 marked the beginning of a shift in the focus of the Cold War to Latin America.¹³ By mid-1960, the United States threatened Cuba with economic embargoes the elimination of sugar import quotas for the coming year. And, after the John F. Kennedy administration broke diplomatic relations with Cuba in January 1961, other Latin American republics were drawn into the Cold War with increased pressure to support US policy towards Cuba. In the face of diplomatic pressure and as an ally of the United States, Brazil chose to adopt an “independent” foreign policy. President Jânio Quadros, elected to office in 1960 on the center-right UDN ticket, reinstated relations with the Soviet Bloc countries that had been severed during the Dutra administration (1946-

¹² In a report prepared from the 1960 census in Pernambuco, 200,103 small landowners (owning 0 to 9 hectares of land) owned 587,848 hectares compared to 567 large landowners (1,000 hectares or more) who owned 1,444,500 hectares. In the form of a percentage (in terms of the total number of establishments for zone and state): small landowners (0 to 9 hectares) made up 76.6% of the landowners but only possessed 9.2% of the total lands; small to mid-sized landowners (10 to 99 hectares) made up 19.3% of landowners and owned 24.4% of the total lands; and large landowners (100 to 999 hectares and those owning over 1,000 hectares) made up only 4% of the landowners but owned 66.4% of the total lands. From Mary Wilkie, “A Report on Rural Syndicates in Pernambuco” (Rio de Janeiro: Latin American Center for Research in the Social Sciences, 1964), p. 4, cited in Cynthia Hewitt, “Brazil: The Peasant Movement,” pp. 375-376. It is unclear whether these statistics include the landless majority.

¹³ Even though the U.S.-supported overthrow of President Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954 displayed characteristics of Cold-War politics, Latin America was not considered a major threat to US security until after the Cuban Revolution.

1951), while attempting to maintain positive but less “dependent” relations with the United States.¹⁴ As a reflection of its “independent” policy, the short-lived Quadros government Brazil denounced both the US and the Soviet Union for foreign aggression in Cuba.¹⁵ However, the Bay of Pigs Invasion of Cuba in April of 1961 solidified Brazil’s stance against US imperialism.¹⁶

Although the Kennedy administration did not agree with or fully trust Jânio Quadros, relations with Brazil became more difficult following his surprise resignation in August 1961, which seemed to leave the political system in Brazil in a state of chaos.¹⁷ Jânio resigned while Vice-President João Goulart, the seasoned PTB (Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro, Brazilian Labor Party) politician known as Jango, was in China working on re-establishing relations between China and Brazil. Goulart returned and took office, but immediately encountered hostility from the military, and before he was sworn in, Congress passed an amendment creating a parliamentary system to limit Goulart’s power as President. Jango’s government adopted

¹⁴ Keith Larry Storrs argues that supporters of independent policy believed that US military and economic interests were more of a threat than communism. This is based on the perceived need for development, which according to independent policy, is impeded by Cold War politics because the US and the Soviet goals are not for development but for domination. Keith Larry Storrs, “Brazil’s Independent Foreign Policy, 1961-1964: Background, Tenets, Linkage to Domestic Politics and Aftermath” (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1973), 228-230.

¹⁵ Jânio, for instance, awarded Ché Guevara the highest medal of honor for foreigners in August 1961. Thomas Skidmore, *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 50.

¹⁶ Upon hearing of the invasion, Jânio contacted the Brazilian representative to the United Nations about the need for a continent-wide rejection of this type of aggression. *Moniz Bandeira, Presença dos Estados Unidos no Brasil (Dois séculos de história)* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1973), p. 409.

¹⁷ Fidel Castro blamed Jânio’s resignation on the US and the “treacherous stroke of imperialism’s paw.” “Moscow Assails U.S. on Quadros,” *New York Times*, 27 August 1961, p. 33.

“independent” policies similar to Quadros’, using the slogan, “*Cuba sí, Yanquis sí, Imperialismo no.*”(Cuba Yes, Yankees Yes, Imperialism No.)¹⁸ In the meantime, inflationary pressures on the rise at the end of Kubitschek’s term in office, rapidly escalated as foreign loans taken out to finance development projects and import-substitution industrialization during the Kubitschek years began to come due in the early 1960s, exacerbating imbalances in federal finances and monetary supply. From January 1963 to March 31, 1964, social activism in Brazil increased, as a variety of social groups voiced demands for an aggressive program of education, labor, electoral and agrarian reforms. These social movements emerged in almost every region of Brazil, but the activism in the Northeast region received the lion’s share of national and international attention.

Although prior to the mid-1950s the U.S. government did not consider Brazil an area of priority, this shifted dramatically in 1960 with the “discovery” of the Ligas Camponesas in Northeastern Brazil. The U.S. government quickly came to regard the social movement as a more significant threat to national security than Castro’s Cuba. In response, the Kennedy administration identified the Northeast as one of the primary targets of the Alliance for Progress; U.S.-based sources of direct and indirect aid soon started to supply the Northeast with economic and technical assistance, largely coordinated out of the US AID (Agency for International Development) mission in Recife, which was the largest US AID office in the world.¹⁹ By 1962,

¹⁸ Louis Wiznitzer, “Which Revolution for Brazil?” *New Republic*, March 19, 1962. Note the strange spelling of the slogan for Brazil which in Portuguese would read, “Cuba sim, ianqui sim, imperialismo não.”

¹⁹ Joseph Page, *The Revolution that Never Was* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1972), 12.

under the aegis of the Alliance for Progress, the U.S. and Brazil pledged \$276 million to create development programs in Northeastern Brazil including projects in electrification, schools, public health programs, and irrigation. Conflicts soon arose between US AID and SUDENE (founded prior to U.S. involvement) since the two agencies had different priorities but had to coordinate their projects because they were both funded with Alliance for Progress money. At the same time that the Northeast was a target for US aid programs, it also became a focus of pro-Cuba and anti-US imperialism movements. Many of the Northeastern social movements and state governments were labeled as being “communist-infiltrated,” or “Fidelistas.” Local political leaders, such as mayor/governor Miguel Arraes, took an anti-US imperialism stance and enforced policies that extended labor legislation to the rural poor. Education programs and Catholic activism prioritized the needs of the poor and fought for the extension of the franchise, especially among the majority of the rural population barred from voting by laws requiring literacy. The rural poor of the Northeast became a national and international priority amidst these Cold War political struggles.

In the arena of cultural and intellectual life, a group of radical filmmakers turned their camera lenses on the Northeast. The “fundamental trilogy” of Cinema Novo - Nelson Pereira dos Santos’s *Vidas secas* (Barren Lives, 1963); Ruy Guerra’s *Os fuzís* (The Guns, 1963); and Glauber Rocha’s *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* (Black God, White Devil, 1964) – all depicted the Northeast, or a certain version of it, in an attempt to provoke a revolutionary response from their audiences and to counter

the “exotic” aesthetic of Hollywood’s depictions of the Third World.²⁰ For filmmakers associated with the Cinema Novo movement, film was seen as a medium that needed to be appropriated from elite and foreign. For the most part, these films used well-known themes associated with Northeastern Brazil including epic stories such as Canudos and Palmares, religious fanaticism, drought, misery and poverty, and exploitation of rural workers by the landed elite.

Again, the rural poor in Northeast Brazil, who constituted one-third of Brazil’s total population in 1960, lived in a highly inequitable society, and in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Northeastern Brazil was the country’s poorest region. Per capita income in the Northeast averaged just above half of the national average.²¹ The unequal distribution of land, resources, and services such as education and health facilities meant that the majority of Northeasterners were landless, illiterate, and malnourished. Death among infants and premature death among adults were fundamental aspects of the region’s demographic indicators.²² The rural workforce enjoyed few of the protections extended to urban industrial workers, and often confronted *capangas* and *grilheiros*, the hired thugs routinely used by large landowners to threaten rural workers with physical violence. Even with high rates of malnutrition, foodstuff production did not have a priority on most of the arable land.

²⁰ Related to Frantz Fanon’s call for violent revolution against colonialism, Glauber Rocha defined the objective of Cinema Novo as provoking violent revolutionary action against the colonizers.

²¹ Kim Sims Taylor, *Sugar and the Underdevelopment of Northeastern Brazil: 1500-1970*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1978), p.5.

²² One of the US AID reports on the Northeast listed life expectancy at 35 years, infant mortality at 33%, and 70% of the population suffering from parasite infections. Only 32% of school age children attended school compared to 43% in Brazil. U.S. Agency for International Development Mission to Brazil. *The Alliance for Progress in Northeast Brazil*. April 29, 1963, p. 16.

Instead, most of the fertile land in the humid costal area (*zona da mata*) was dedicated to the export crop of sugar cane, a crop that had been grown in the Northeast since the sixteenth century. Most of the rural social movements had their strength in the *mata* or the *agreste*, a transitional area where cotton plantations, foodstuff production and ranching are more common. The third geographic zone in the Northeast is the hinterland known as the *sertão*, the largest area and a semi-arid zone where the main products of cattle, cotton, sisal and corn. While some of the rural social movements attempted to establish leagues or unions in the *sertão*, both the history and memory of this is almost impossible to trace.²³

It is against this political and social background that various rural social movements – the *Ligas Camponesas*, the Communist Party Rural Syndicates, and the Catholic Federations of Rural Workers – arose. The *Ligas Camponesas*, or Peasant Leagues, became the most important political movement, and the one that led Northeastern Brazil to be considered, in the words of JFK, “the most dangerous area in world.” Although no consensus exists on the actual date of the formation of the organization, the most common date cited is 1954, the year when Oscar de Arruda Beltrão, owner of a defunct sugar plantation called the Engenho Galiléia, was named the first president (*Presidente de Honra*) of the SAPP (Agricultural and Cattle Raising Society of Pernambuco). Some accounts describe Beltrão’s initial enthusiasm for the *Sociedade* but if this enthusiasm ever existed, it was short-lived. Soon after the Association was officially founded, Beltrão started to worry that its existence threatened his authority. This may have been because the rural workers used the Association to discuss labor/land agreements such as rent prices or unpaid

labor practices. Other accounts explain Beltrão's concerns as being due to his connections with other landowners who warned him about the dangers of having such an association on his property because of the laborers' ability to organize or because of the supposed threat of communist infiltration. Still others claim that Beltrão had decided to sell the engenho and needed an excuse to expel the workers from his lands. In any case, Beltrão demanded the extinction of the SAPPP and threatened to throw the rural workers off his land. And, this is where Francisco Julião entered the story.

Led by the ex-administrator of the Engenho Galiléia, José Francisco de Souza, or "o velho Zezé," and José dos Prazeres, a group of rural workers traveled to Recife in early January 1955. They had heard of a lawyer and state deputy who had the reputation of defending the rights of rural people. These rural workers – soon to be known as "Galileus" – went to Francisco Julião's home in Caxangá, just outside of Recife, where he agreed to take up their legal claims, the case of Galiléia. While most of the accounts of the Ligas Camponesas flash forward to 1959 and the legal victory for the expropriation of the Engenho Galiléia, a few of the incidents and struggles that took place from 1955 to 1959 influenced the way the story was conceptualized.

From 1955 to 1959, state deputy Francisco Julião (PSB, Brazilian Socialist Party) became aware of the three tools that he had for organizing the Ligas Camponesas: the civil code, the Bible and *literatura de cordel* (popular pamphlet poetry).²⁴ But, he also realized that he had to figure out a way to counter the type of

²⁴ In 1959, Julião claims that from 1955 to 1959, thousands of *folhetos* or pamphlets were published and distributed with titles such as, "Foreiro de Pernambuco," "A guia do camponês," "O ABC do camponês," and "Meu recado ao camponês." These

violence that limited the organization of rural unions, or a way to question the legitimacy of the use of force by the state police and the large landowner's hired thugs (*capangas* or *grilheiros*). If the Ligas Camponesas were to function as a coherent rural social movement, they had to address concerns faced by the majority of rural people, regardless of their labor conditions (i.e., peasants, cane laborers, squatters, *parceiros*, *posseiros*, *foreiros*, *cambeeiros*, *meeiros*, etc.). The issue of agrarian reform had to be taken up at the national level in order to be effective, so Julião had to devise a way to turn a very local or at most a regional movement into a national struggle. Furthermore, the Ligas Camponesas needed to be seen as non-communist or they needed to redefine the way communism was viewed in the rural areas.

Francisco Julião first concerned himself with turning the SAPPP into a legal rural association, with an elected council, membership cards and dues. Rural unions were illegal at the time, although mutual-aid associations had existed from the time of slavery. The first step Julião took in 1955 was to notarize and legalize the documents that established the SAPPP. From here, he started the legal process of filing for the right to expropriate, first presented to the Assembléia Legislativa in July 1957. Under the Brazilian Civil Code, if landowners were not using their land or were underutilizing their land, it was stipulated that the land could be expropriated by the state with fair compensation (Art. 155, “o uso da propriedade será condicionado ao

folhetos functioned as a way to spread the news about the Ligas Camponesas. “Dep. Julião Desmente o Caráter Subversivo das Ligas Camponesas” *Diário de Pernambuco* 16 May 1959, 12.

bem-estar social”). Although this had never occurred before the case of Galiléia, it was a legal avenue that could be pursued by Julião and other lawyers.

During this period, as a state deputy, Julião also started to change the language used to describe the rural population. In a speech in 1955 in the Assembléia Legislativa, Julião introduced the term “camponês” (peasant) when discussing an issue related to agriculture. Julião was interrupted during his speech by deputada Maria Elisa Viegas de Medeiros, a schoolteacher, who asked if he could use a word less politically charged to describe the rural population, and suggested the term “rurícola.”²⁵ Rurícola was the official word used by the elite to describe the rural population, but it was not a term rural people used to describe themselves. For instance, no Brazilian would say “I am a rurícola,” but instead would refer to the type of labor relationship they maintained (“I am a parceiro, foreiro, etc.”) or their job title (“I am a cane cutter.”). In fact, it is difficult to find “rurícola” in Portuguese dictionaries, since it is more commonly associated with Latin (i.e., country-dweller) or binomial nomenclature (e.g., *Clytus ruricola*, *Gecarcinus ruricola*). In the Assembléia Legislativa, Julião defended his use of the term “camponês” since rural people came from the “campo” (countryside) and they did not know the term “rurícola.” Julião also claimed to have used the term camponês because it classified a group that opposed the latifundiários.

On September 3, 1955, the first Congresso Camponês de Pernambuco was held in Recife bringing together around 3,000 participants, and with federal deputy

²⁵ This incident was described in detail in Vandeck Santiago, *Francisco Julião: Luta, paixão e morte de um agitador. Perfil Parlamentar Século XX* (Recife: Assembléia Legislativa do Estado de Pernambuco, 2001), 59-61.

Josué de Castro presiding. After the conference, the participants took to the streets, marching in what was declared to be the first organized protest in Pernambuco by rural workers.²⁶ The success of this march and the need to create broader visibility for the struggle of rural workers in Northeastern Brazil led to more organized marches, occurring frequently from 1955 to 1959.²⁷ By 1959, when the question of the expropriation was being debated, reports in the conservative press claimed that the state felt threatened by the presence and visibility of the thousands of rural men and women who gathered in the capital to hear the decision. According to some sources, over 3,000 rural workers had converged on the capital accompanied by another 3,000 urban supporters.

The story of origin culminates in 1959 with the expropriation of the Engenho Galiléia and the proliferation of peasant leagues that had already begun to organize in rural communities throughout Northeastern Brazil. State deputy Carlos Luíz de Andrade (PSB) and lawyer Djacy Magalhães put forth the claim for the expropriation of Engenho Galiléia. By many accounts, it was the first time in history that a large landowner (*senhor de engenho*) was forced to stand in court next to a *camponês*. The expropriation was listed as one of the ten most important events of 1959 in the *Diário de Pernambuco*.²⁸ By late November, the numerous trials and delays of the final sentence finally ended with the decision that Galiléia was to be expropriated and its owner properly reimbursed.

²⁶ Ibid., 71-72.

²⁷ Supposedly 80 marches took place in Pernambuco between 1957 and 1959. Vandeck Santiago, *Francisco Julião, as Ligas Camponesas, e o golpe militar de 64* (Recife: Comunigraf Editora, 2004).

²⁸ “Os Dez Acontecimentos Mais Importantes em Pernambuco,” *Diário de Pernambuco* 1 January 1960, 1.

The Ligas fought for the civil rights of rural men and women, which they believed included the right to own property, “the land they worked.” They also mobilized for the extension of public services, such as electricity, water, schools and health care facilities. Since the requirements for voting were based on literacy, it is significant that one of the reasons for the organization of the SAPPP was to found a school and hire a teacher. Enfranchisement and an extension of civil rights in the rural areas was seen as a way to fight the traditional power wielded by the large landowners and coroneis (rural political bosses). Perhaps most of all, many rural workers joined Ligas or formed similar organizations because they saw this as a way to improve their precarious living conditions in some way. The specific motives vary from having the ability to fight against the rising land rental prices, to fighting against their expulsion from the landowner’s property, to increasing their wages and improve their working conditions, to declaring illegal the corvée or system of unpaid labor days, to decreasing the landowner’s power over their personal lives (e.g., many rural men complained about the landowners raping wives and daughters). Studies of the Ligas Camponesas have concentrated on identifying the main reasons for the emergence of the Ligas, but it seems safe to say that this diverse group of rural workers had many different reasons and motivations, but they saw the Ligas and other rural social movements as a way to improve their living conditions, or in other words, to be recognized as citizens of the modern nation and have national laws and norms extended to include rural men and women.

After the initial legal victory in 1959, the Ligas expanded into many rural communities throughout the Northeast with their central headquarters in Recife.

While the majority of new Ligas were located in Pernambuco, the Liga of Sapé in Paraíba turned into the largest peasant league. By 1962, Ligas had been established throughout the Northeastern states, although their numbers remained small outside of Pernambuco and Paraíba. Ligas also existed throughout Brazil: there were at least four Ligas in Bahia, a handful in the state of Rio de Janeiro, and a few in Paraná and Santa Catarina in the South. These Ligas eventually merged with other rural social movements that enjoyed a greater presence in areas outside the Northeast, such as MASTER in Rio Grande do Sul.

The historiography claims that the Ligas lost significant support throughout Brazil after the November 1961 National Peasant's Congress in Belo Horizonte. The meeting was led by the Communist Party-backed organization, the Union of Farmers and Agricultural Workers of Brazil (ULTAB; União de Lavradores e Trabalhadores Agrícolas do Brasil), and in the meeting President João Goulart and PCB leader Luís Carlos Prestes tried to make an agreement with Julião to incorporate the Ligas into a National Rural Worker's Union, established a few years later in 1963 as the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG). Julião refused both the offer by Goulart and the PCB, based on his concern that the Ligas would lose their commitment to rural Nordestinos and their independence as a social movement. Many scholars have interpreted this decision as guided by Julião's fear of losing control and power, and regarded his discord with the PCB and Goulart as signs that he wanted to remain the leader of a social movement more than to "help" push forward a national program of agrarian reform. Scholars have also linked the decision to his insistence on "radical agrarian reform" and his commitment to the

“messianic” traditions of the rural Northeast. But, as mentioned earlier, historians have made certain judgments about the Ligas based on a series of political assumptions. For instance, it is not clear how scholars deduced that the Ligas “lost support” other than the fact that by 1961 a number of competing rural social movements had emerged. But, even this does not necessarily mean that the Ligas had lost support; it just means that other groups were also active in organizing rural people and the Ligas lost their monopoly on rural organizing in the Northeast. In fact, the same information might be interpreted as an indication of the success of the Ligas, which made the Northeast fertile terrain for other social movements. The sheer number of police and newspaper reports on Ligas land invasions and conflicts in Pernambuco and Paraíba until 31 March 1964 suggests that the Ligas maintained strength and support in the countryside.

It must be noted that even though the historiography has often tried to draw distinctions between the three main rural social movements in Northeastern Brazil – the Ligas Camponesas, the PCB rural unions and the Catholic Church Federation of Rural Workers – this division is problematic since many people were involved in more than one of these movements.²⁹ Members of the PCB and Catholic priests participated in the Ligas Camponesas, and at times the local movements overlapped and combined their efforts. However, the three movements *were* different in terms of their discourse and goals. One of the differences between the Ligas and the

²⁹ For instance, Luciana de Barros Jaccoud, *Movimentos sociais e crise política em Pernambuco, 1955-1968* (Recife: Editora Massangana, 1990); Bernadete Wrubleski Aued, *A vitória dos vencidos: Partido Comunista Brasileiro e Ligas Camponesas, 1955-1964* (Florianópolis: Editora da UFSC, 1985); Fernando Antônio Azevedo, *As Ligas Camponesas* (São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 1982); Elide de Rugai Bastos, *As Ligas Camponesas* (Petropolis: Editora Vozes, 1984).

Communist Party rural unions was the influence of the Communist Party as a central organizing unit. The PCB had two national newspapers for rural struggles, *Novos Rumos*, published in Rio de Janeiro, and *Terra Livre*, published in São Paulo, that started in the mid-1940s and had an on-again off-again run through 1964. While many reports about Julião's Ligas appeared in these papers, written mostly by Clodomir Morais de Santos, a Ligas leader who was also in the PCB, these periodicals mainly concentrated on the struggles for land in the south. Thus, it follows that in conceiving the story of origin of the PCB rural unions, their leaders harked back to previous attempts to organize Ligas in the south as well as in Pernambuco that predated the rise of the Ligas Camponesas associated with Julião.³⁰

According to the PCB, the Galileus first approached the PCB with their problem following the formation of the SAPPP and the threat of being thrown off the engenho. The PCB suggested that they go to deputado Francisco Julião, who the PCB thought could handle this situation with greater efficacy. What they did not expect was that he would use the 1955 Galiléia episode to form a large rural social movement that did not follow the Party line. The PCB argues that key rural leaders, such as José dos Prazeres, were affiliated with the Communist Party. José dos Prazeres had supposedly been involved in the PCB Ligas of the 1940s and had been a staunch radical for many years, even organizing a group to participate in the Mexican Revolution. The PCB claimed "ownership" so to speak of the Ligas Camponesas, but later started their own rural unions when Julião refused to follow the Party line. The

³⁰ In 1945, with the fall of the Estado Novo, the PCB was declared a legal party until 1947 and in these years, a number of Ligas Camponesas were organized throughout Brazil (e.g., the Liga Camponesa de Dumont in São Paulo, the Liga Camponesa de Boa Idéia in Ipatinga, Pernambuco).

PCB rural unions also became most closely identified with organizing the cane workers, who the PCB saw as the most revolutionary force in the countryside. As a result, these PCB-linked organizations were concentrated more on cane workers, they were more interested in struggles for workers' rights than radical agrarian reform.

Gregório Bezerra was the Communist leader most frequently associated with the PCB rural unions, and the areas where the PCB held the most strength were in the towns of Palmares, along the southern coast of Pernambuco, and Jaboatão, close to Recife. The unions supported Governor Miguel Arraes, and received support from the Arraes administration. The PCB rural unions in Palmares coordinated one of the largest and most successful strikes in the history of the cane industry in November 1963. Over 200,000 workers, both cane cutters and mill workers, paralyzed the sugar industry for four days in Pernambuco, demanding the right to the minimum wage, one day off a week, and the right to paid national and religious holidays. The strike was successful in part because of the timing – if the sugar cane was not processed quickly the entire crop would spoil – and because of support from Arraes. The agreement reached allowed for an eight-hour work day, a limit on the number of pieces a worker could be required to cut or plant in an eight-hour day, and a very significant increase in wages, from 12 cents a day to 72 cents.³¹ Following the 1964 coup, the PCB leaders were arrested and subjected to particularly public and brutal violence by the military authorities.

Similar to the PCB in the sense that regional movements were connected to a larger centralized infrastructure, the Catholic Church also began organizing

³¹ Gregorio Bezerra, *Memorias*, 177.

federations of rural workers in the early 1960s. According to the historiography, the Church federations emerged as a reaction to Julião's Ligas and the PCB rural unions. Particularly since Julião used the bible as one of his main organizing tools, it has been argued that this moved the Church to radicalize and focus greater attention on the rural population. But, a number of stories from the Church about the rural social movements in the 50s and 60s locate Church programs at the forefront of these rural struggles. As in the case of the PCB, the Catholic rural movements were connected to a broader infrastructure, the Catholic Church, which was increasingly progressive during the papacy of Pope John XXIII (1958-1963). The encyclical *Mateu et Magistra* (1961) called for a new focus on the "social question," and specifically on the poor and the Third World, and served as a starting point for what later became known as liberation theology.

According to the Church, the new attention to the rural population in Northeastern Brazil started with conferences organized in the mid-1950s. In August 1955, the first conference on poverty and the suffering of the Nordeste, the "Congresso do Salvação do Nordeste," (not to be confused with the I Congresso Camponês de Pernambuco held in September 1955) took place in the Pernambucan capital. This ecumenical conference involved many politicians, journalists, lawyers, engineers, and bishops who met to discuss reforms and development projects for Northeastern Brazil. Although the document that came out of the conference, *Carta de Salvação do Nordeste* did not mention agrarian reform, many of the participants raised the issue, including Father Leopoldo Brentana of the Ação Católica Operário.³²

³² Antonio Antônio Azevedo, *As Ligas Camponesas* (Rio: Paz e Terra, 1982), p.65

In May 1956, the I Encontro dos Bispos do Nordeste took place in Campina Grande, a city in the interior of Paraíba. The conference objectives centered on the problem of migration, but included issues such as rural credit, colonization programs, social services and education, and electrification. The second regional bishops' conference was held in May of 1959 in Natal, Rio Grande do Norte, and focused on the social and human issues related to development projects.³³ What is interesting about these conferences is how they connect the Church to national programs and projects for development.³⁴ Although the bishops' conferences discussed the problem of the Nordeste and the Nordeste, local organizing did not start until 1961.

The two main leaders associated with the Church Federations in Pernambuco were Padre Antonio Melo and Padre Paulo Crespo. Padre Crespo led the Church Federation of Rural Workers (sometimes referred to as the Legiões Agrárias de Pernambuco) and SORPE (Serviço de Orientação Rural de Pernambuco) in Jaboatão, Pernambuco, and became a leading spokesman for the movement. Padre Melo led the Catholic rural union movement in Cabo, Pernambuco as well as the colonization and cooperative land projects in the area.³⁵ The key difference between the Church Federations and the PCB unions and Ligas Camponesas is that the Church supported colonization projects as agrarian reform, and the Church followed a line associated with developmentalism. Furthermore, Church-affiliated peasant leaders were less

³³ "Instala-se hoje o encontro de Bispos," *O Estado de São Paulo* 24 May 1959, p.5. Out of this conference came the first plans for a national program for economic development to replace DNOCS, which came to be known as SUDENE.

³⁴ Anibal Teixeira de Souza, *Os bispos do Nordeste e as migrações internas* (Rio: Instituto Nacional de Imigração e Colonização, Departamento de Estudos e Planejamentos, 1961), p.34.

³⁵ "Padre Melo prega a reforma agrária: É anti-Marxista," *Diario de Pernambuco* 15 May 1963, 3.

likely to be subjected to military repression; indeed, both priests remained active in the rural labor movement even after the dictatorship took power.

This introduction serves as a rough overview of some of the major actors, events and issues in Northeastern Brazil during the Cold War. The dissertation chapters show how these diverse social actors drew upon regional historical symbols to find support for their political projects. The region of Northeastern Brazil became a focus of Cold War conflicts, as well as Brazilian and local political struggles, for a very short period of time – from 1959 to 1964. Because of the high level of social, political and cultural activism, the period provides an optimal window for examining the political and cultural struggles of the region and how they connect to national and international politics. It is a story of the Cold War, as Joseph Page's quote at the beginning of the chapter suggests, but also of regional and national politics. The fact that the 1964 coup repressed these social movements has allowed the story to turn into yet another example of the tragic Northeastern narrative. My dissertation shows how this narrative has functioned, both as a means of resistance and a means of legitimizing the status quo.

Chapter 2: *O Nordeste*: Regionalism, Nationalism and Third Worldism During the Cold War

*What we have to conquer each and every hour of every day, what we have to deserve, is the future of a free and emancipated people.*³⁶

*Easiness is not of our world, the world of the Northeast. We are made of suffering and perseverance, learning from an early age that stubbornness is the condition of our daily life.*³⁷

Miguel Arraes de Alencar
Guerreiro do povo, o Chapéu da palha³⁸
Phrases on a flyer at his funeral, 13 August
2005³⁹

Regional identities oftentimes have their roots in topographic, ethnic, or linguistic distinctions that mark a region as an exception to an imagined homogeneous national identity. Instead of mountains or waterways delineating the diverse and immense area known as *o Nordeste* (Northeastern Brazil), its boundaries lie in historical narratives of inequality and poverty, violence and messianism, sugar production and exploitive labor relations, hunger and drought, and survival and resistance.⁴⁰ (for

³⁶ *O futuro do povo livre e emancipado, esse nós temos que merecer, que conquistar a cada hora e a cada dia.*

³⁷ *A facilidade não é deste nosso mundo, o Nordeste. Somos feitos de sofrimento e de perseverança, cedo aprendemos que a teimosia é a condição de nosso viver*

³⁸ Miguel Arraes was one of the most symbolic figures of the politics of the 1960s. The phrases used to define Arraes - “guerilla of the people” and “hat of straw” - illustrate his popularity with the people of the Northeast.

³⁹ Arraes played an important role in Northeastern Politics, with the exception of his period of exile in Algeria from 1964-1979. Mayor of Recife (1958-1962); Governor of Pernambuco (1962 – 1 April 1964); Federal deputy (1982-1986; 1990-1994; 2002-2005); Governor of Pernambuco (1986-1990; 1994-1998).

⁴⁰ In 1960, the Northeast was defined as having between 1.2 and 1.6 million square kilometers, almost the size of France, Italy and Spain combined with 20 to 25 million inhabitants, one-third of the Brazilian population. This population was greater than the population of any other Spanish-speaking Latin American country.

map, see appendix) Multiple images of *o Nordeste* constitute the popular consciousness stretching from sugar cane fields, to colonial churches, to arid desert lands, to palm tree-lined beaches. A regional accent and vocabulary supposedly exists, traditions and legends such as Festas Juninas⁴¹ or Lampião⁴² are designated as “nordestino,” and local fairs exhibit Northeastern culture and artifacts on a weekly basis. A number of recent scholars have denounced the notion of “o Nordeste” by emphasizing its imagined discursive construction and showing how inequalities and discrimination are manifested in regional identity.⁴³ Some have argued that the idea of the Northeast was a particular manifestation of the power of the landowning elite who “invented” the region to maintain their dominance and to avoid being “swallowed up” by the larger nation.⁴⁴ While I agree that the Northeast is a cultural and political construction of Otherness that can have destructive consequences, *o Nordeste* is also an identity that has been used to create solidarity between social classes, and to struggle for political action with the objective of creating a more equitable society. Miguel Arraes’s funeral, for example, brought together hundreds of thousands of Nordestinos, rich and poor, who shared an admiration for a leader who believed in the Northeast and Nordestinos and fought throughout his life for this

⁴¹ Festival of São João (Saint John), Saint Peter and Saint Anthony associated strongly with rural Northeastern Brazil in terms of cultural manifestations such as food and dance “typical” of the region.

⁴² Lampião was a well-known *cangaceiro* (backlands bandit) who has been transformed into a key symbol of the Northeast.

⁴³ Frederico de Castro Neves, *Imagens do Nordeste: A construção da memória regional* (Fortaleza: RCV Editoração e Artes Gráficas Ltda, 1994); Albuquerque Júnior, *A Invenção Do Nordeste*.

⁴⁴ Bernadete Beserra, “Introduction,” and Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Júnior, “Weaving Tradition: The Invention of the Brazilian Northeast,” *Latin American Perspectives* 31, no.2 (March 2004): 3-15; 42-61.

“imagined” place. The point of studying regionalism is not only to demonstrate how it has created Northeastern Brazil as the Other, but to show how and why regionalism exists and perseveres in Brazil, not only as an elite construction but also as a popular tool to organize social struggle. The first part of this chapter describes some of the cultural constructions of Northeastern Brazil in the early twentieth century and introduces topics central to the historiography on regionalism to provide the background to understand the political and cultural struggles that took place in the late 1950s and early 1960s over the definition of Northeastern Brazil.

The regional identity of Northeastern Brazil owes much to Euclides da Cunha’s *Os sertões* (Rebellion in the Backlands, 1903), a famous epic of the War of Canudos (1896-97).⁴⁵ The account is still considered one of the most important works in shaping Brazilian intellectual formation.⁴⁶ Da Cunha’s positivist account was first published as a series of newspaper articles for *O Estado de São Paulo* that described destruction of a millenarian community in the interior of Bahia in the early years of the Brazilian Republic. In the book, Da Cunha divided the story into three sections: “The Land,” “Man” and the “War of Canudos.” Through these divisions, he argued how geographical conditions of this region and the historical legacy of colonialism and miscegenation had intertwined to create a backwards population. He argued that the Nordeste population threatened modern Brazilian civilization, and

⁴⁵ Among others, Bernadete Beserra argues that the idea of Northeastern Brazil as a “region” was a twentieth century invention. Beserra, “Introduction,” 5.

⁴⁶ In a 1994 study of the most important works in Brazil, *Os sertões* was listed as number one. Regina Abreu, *O enigma de Os Sertões* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Rocco Ltda.; Fundação Nacional de Arte, 1998), 11. For more on *Os Sertões* and regional identity, see David M. Jordan, *New World Regionalism: Literature in the Americas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

its “biological evolution” was the only way to assure national preservation.⁴⁷ In *Os sertões*, the marginalization of the people of the sertão made them susceptible to religious fanaticism, and they tragically fought to their death against state militias and federal troops in defense of their community and leader.

From 1920 to 1940, regionalist authors and artists built on the model introduced by Euclides da Cunha, depicting Northeastern Brazil as a miserable, impoverished, and backwards region that was, at the same time, the traditional heart of the Brazilian nation.⁴⁸ Through a few key symbols – drought, religious fanaticism, coronelismo (rural political bosses), colonial legacies, traditional culture, and the social banditry of the cangaceiro – the regionalists created an imagined cohesive place designated as *o Nordeste*. The area of this culturally constructed *Nordeste* covered the states of Maranhão, Piauí, Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Alagoas, Sergipe, and Bahia.⁴⁹ The novels, plays, essays and poetry of Rachel de Queiroz, José Lins do Rego, Graciliano Ramos, João Cabral de Melo Neto, José Américo de Almeida, Gilberto Freyre and Jorge Amado composed the regionalist movement, known as the “geração de 1930.” Artists such as Cícero Dias

⁴⁷ “Our biological evolution demands the guarantee of social evolution. We are condemned to civilization. Either we shall progress or we shall perish.” Euclides da Cunha, *Rebellion in the Backlands*, trans. Samuel Putnam. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), 54.

⁴⁸ The connection between regionalism and literature has been studied by scholars such as Raymond Williams, who argued that the regional novels function as a way to discriminate between the city and country/the modern and traditional/the metropolitan and the provincial. Raymond Williams, “Region and Class in the Novel,” in *The Uses of Fiction: Essays on the Modern Novel in Honour of Arnold Kettle*, ed. Douglas Jefferson and Graham Martin (Milton Keynes: The Open University Press, 1982): 59-68.

⁴⁹ Bahia is sometimes considered part of the Northeast but its status as a nordestino state is ambiguous. Reasons for this will be explained in detail later.

and Lula Cardoso Ayres painted scenes of plantation society and Northeastern folklore; Di Cavalcanti and Carybé portrayed life in Bahia, and Cândido Portinari portrayed scenes of misery and drought refugees. The diversity of topics – from sugar or cacau plantations to drought-stricken populations in the interior sertão – illustrated the “contrasts” of Northeastern Brazil. What tied Jorge Amado’s mulattas to Graciliano Ramos’s sertanejos was their Otherness in comparison to the urban center-south and their confinement to a context in which colonial and historic legacies determined present and future society.

The cinema industry in Brazil in the early twentieth century also influenced the cultural construction of regionalism. Before the studio system of the 1950s developed in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Northeastern Brazil had its own regional cinema, referred to as the “Ciclo do Recife” or “Recifewood.” From 1923 to 1931, the cineastas produced 13 films, the best known of which were Gentil Roiz’s *Aítare de praia* (1925), Tancredo Seabra’s *Filho sem mãe* (1925) and Jota Soares’s *A filha do advogado* (1927), and Chagas Ribeiro’s *Revezes* (1927). Although only a few of the Ciclo do Recife films were preserved, the general themes were focused on life and culture of the Northeast, whether fishing communities using jangadas (small boats typical of the region), cangaceiros, carnaval in Pernambuco, cowboy festas, or urban Recife, *Revezes* developed the theme of a peasant uprising against large landowners.⁵⁰ Film critics have debated the “authenticity” of the Ciclo do Recife films, some claiming that they were copies of North American silent films and others claiming

⁵⁰ Alexandre Figueirôa, *Cinema Pernambucano: uma história em ciclos* (Recife: Prefeitura da Cidade do Recife; Secretaria de Cultura, Turismo e Esportes; Fundação de Cultura, Cidade do Recife, 2000).

that these films represented the true national cinema.⁵¹ A recent scholar of the Ciclo do Recife argues that the films were regional productions influenced by the Modernist Movement of 1922, imbued with regionalist narratives and themes.⁵² Early silent cinema production in other areas of Brazil depicted Northeastern Brazil through on one particular theme: the cangaceiro. Films such as *Lampião, o Banditismo do Nordeste* (1927); José Nelli's *Lampião, a Fera do Nordeste* (1930) and Benjamin Abrahão's documentary *Lampião, o Rei do Cangaço* (1936) all approached the story of the famous cangaceiros as documentary-style dramas.⁵³

Some intellectuals and artists have drawn a distinction between the two *Nordestes*, the arid sertão and the cane-growing coastal region. One of the best-known scholars of Northeastern Brazil, Gilberto Freyre, based his work on *o Nordeste* almost entirely on the sugar cane region. In *Casa-Grande e Senzala* (1933), Freyre argued that through a mixture of the three “races” (Portuguese, Indian, and African), the plantation system had allowed for the blending of religions, foods, and traditions that constituted the essence of Brazilian identity. Other authors focus only on the sertão, a broader geographic area that extends beyond the technical borders of the “Northeast” into the state of Minas Gerais. This definition allows scholars to incorporate national literary works such as João Guimarães Rosa's *Grande Sertão*:

⁵¹ Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes claimed that these films were imitations of North American narratives, and Alex Viany argued that the Ciclo do Recife films were “a significant affirmation of genuine national cinema.” Cited in Eduardo Duarte, *A Estética do Ciclo do Recife* (Recife: Editora Universitária da UFPE, 1995), 42-44.

⁵² Eduardo Duarte, *A Estética do Ciclo do Recife* (Recife: Editora Universitária da UFPE, 1995), 42-44.

⁵³ Luiz Felipe Miranda, “Cinema e Cangaço – História” *Cangaço: O Nordeste no Cinema Brasileiro* org., Maria do Rosário Caetano (Brasília: Avathar Soluções Gráficas, 2005), 92-110.

Veredas (*The Devil to Pay in the Backlands*, 1956). While some argue that the sertão intertwines with *o Nordeste*,⁵⁴ others argue that the sertão is itself a separate region of Brazil.⁵⁵ (see appendix) The tension exists in defining inhabitants as well. At times, the sertanejo is synonymous with Nordestino but certain groups who are Nordestino are never considered sertanejo; for instance, coastal cane workers. While this distinction reflects the geographic diversity of Northeastern Brazil, the distinction is also based on imagined cultural and racial differences that define the sertanejo as mixed race – of white and Indian descent – whereas the cane worker is associated with African descent. What is similar about the scholars of the plantations and the scholars of the sertão is that they all argue for the centrality of these areas to the Brazilian nation. The image of Northeastern Brazil is broad enough to encompass multiple stories and settings so long as these accounts reflect the key themes of misery, violence, inequality, climatic harshness, the non-white, folk religions, or in general terms, the non-modern.

In a comprehensive historical study of the cultural construction of Northeastern Brazil, or *o Nordeste*, Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Júnior draws from Edward Said's *Orientalism* to show how artists, novelists and other cultural actors created Northeastern Brazil as the Other in Brazil.⁵⁶ He looks at how mechanisms of cultural production created the geographical space known as *o Nordeste*, by connecting this space to a historic past through what they defined as traditional

⁵⁴ Silvie Debs, *Cinema et littérature au Brésil. Les mythes du Sertão: émergence d'une identité nationale*. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002); Paulo Emílio Matos Marins, *A reinvenção do Sertão* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora FGV, 2001).

⁵⁵ Janaína Amado, "Região, Sertão, Nação," *Estudos Históricos*, 8: 15 (1995): 145-151.

⁵⁶ Albuquerque Júnior, *A Invenção Do Nordeste*.

Northeastern culture. Through a repetition of texts and images, Northeastern Brazil was “nordestinizado,” turned into an imagined area of misery, violence, folklore, fanaticism, and rebellion that became the Other of the modern, urban center-south of Brazil. In this chapter, I build on Albuquerque’s arguments about the construction of *o Nordeste* in the twentieth century by situating them in the milieu of political and cultural debates centered on Northeastern Brazil during the Cold War. I examine how numerous social actors – the Ligas Camponesas, the US government and media, and Northeastern intellectuals – energized these debates, redefining *o Nordeste* through the appropriation of regional symbols and narratives. But, before turning to this analysis, I want to briefly discuss historiographical debates on regionalism to show why it is particularly important in Brazilian and in Cold War history.

In trying to understand the rise of regionalism, some scholars have argued that regionalism emerged as a way to contest the “grand narratives” of the nation, to locate a more “authentic” coherency between people and to refer to “marginalized spaces” in the nation.⁵⁷ The region has often symbolized the authentic past roots of a people, a local or provincial space at odds with the modern nation. The quest for authenticity is a struggle for power, where state and non-state actors attempt to fix local culture, defining certain cultural artifacts as the official culture or “folklore.”⁵⁸ Scholars have examined these struggles over identity in relation to gender and

⁵⁷ Roberto Maria Dainotto, “ ‘All the Regions Do Smilingly Revolt’: The Literature of Place and Region,” *Critical Inquiry* 22:3 (Spring 1996), 486-505.

⁵⁸ In the Brazilian case, this can be seen in the literature and film but also as a part of the Brazilian Folklore Movement that had institutional support through the Comissão Nacional de Folclore (CNFL) and the Campanha de Defesa do Folclore Brasileiro that started in 1958. Luís Rodolfo Vilhena, *Projeto e missão: o movimento folclórico brasileiro, 1947-1964* (Rio de Janeiro: FUNARTE; Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1997).

race/ethnicity, and have shown how the construction of authenticity is a contested process over what is considered regional by examining how larger narratives – such as racial and sexual discourses - frame definitions of region culture.⁵⁹ As Dianotto argues, the similarities between regionalism and nationalism are greater than the differences; they “speak the same language and foster the same desires (...) of purity and authenticity.”⁶⁰

While some of the same types of representations and beliefs form national and regional identity (i.e., creating an imagined community), according to Pierre Bourdieu, the idea of regionalism rests on “di-vision” or “the power to make people see and believe, to get them to know and recognize, to impose the legitimate definition of the divisions of the social world and, thereby, to *make and unmake groups*.”⁶¹ Bourdieu argues that the way to understand regional identity is by trying to locate a separation between representation and reality, even if this only involves the study of struggles over representations and the “social demonstrations whose aim it is to manipulate mental images.” Bourdieu’s arguments on the connection between representation and reality are similar to Stuart Hall’s claim that “how things are represented and the ‘machineries’ and regimes of representation in a culture play a

⁵⁹ For instance, Margaret Jacobs examined how white women (female moral reformers and anti-modern feminists) defined Pueblo Indian culture of the Southwest through their political projects to preserve or save the Indian Other. Margaret Jacobs, *Engendered Encounters: Feminism and Pueblo Cultures, 1879-1934* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

⁶⁰ Dianotto, “ ‘All the Regions,’ ” 505.

⁶¹ Pierre Bourdieu, “Identity and Representation: Elements for a Critical Reflection on the Idea of Region.” In *Language and Symbolic Power*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 221.

constitutive, and not merely a reflexive, after-the-event role.”⁶² Both Bourdieu and Hall argue that the discursive or the representational realm is not an innate or real distinction, but at the same time, in Bourdieu’s words, the representations are the means through which “social agents imagine the divisions of reality and which contribute to the reality of the divisions.”⁶³ The key issue then becomes the need to examine the contestations and struggles in the process of shaping and forming regional identities to demonstrate the power relations framing these identities. Such analyses show the broader power relations and politics within the nation in distinguishing the National from the Other.⁶⁴

During the development of modern Latin American nations, the regional has been stigmatized as provincial and traditional, while also condensing the material and social problems that afflict the Third World. Numerous scholars have approached the topic of regionalism in Latin America, showing the processes of regional construction as linked to colonial legacies, ethnicities, and geographical distinctions (i.e., *serra/costa*).⁶⁵ Regional differences in Latin America have been racialized,

⁶² Stuart Hall, “New Ethnicities” in *Black Film/British Cinema*. Ed., Kobena Mercer. (London: Institute of Contemporary Art, 1988).

⁶³ Bourdieu, “Identity and Representation,” 226.

⁶⁴ Celia Applegate argues that “the most promising historical work is moving toward an understanding of regional politics that sees them everywhere(...) as constitutive – not imitative – of the politics of the nation-state, in effect the infrastructure of the political process altogether.” Celia Applegate, “A Europe of Regions: Reflections on the Historiography of Sub-National Places in Modern Times,” *The American Historical Review* 104:4 (Oct., 1999), 1172.

⁶⁵ Ana María Alonso, *Thread of Blood: Colonialism, Revolution, and Gender on Mexico’s Northern Frontier* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995); Nancy Appelbaum, *Muddied Waters: Race, Region and Local History in Columbia, 1846-1948* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Marisol de la Cadena, *Indigenous Mestizos: The Politics of Race and Culture in Cuzco, Peru, 1919-1991* (Durham:

distinguishing black and Indian regions as backwards and the Other in relation to areas portrayed as white and modern.⁶⁶ Brazilian regionalism holds a distinct resonance in the study of regionalism. As Barbara Weinstein has argued, “Regionalism is still a very lively issue in Brazil not simply because of lingering emotional loyalties, or residual administrative decentralization, but because of the nation’s glaring and seemingly ineradicable regional economic inequalities.”⁶⁷ Bernadete Beserra makes a similar economic argument claiming that the image of the Northeast and the Nordeste was created during the “nationalization of capital in Brazil, characterized by the concentration of resources of the different regions in that of the Central South under the dominance of São Paulo.”⁶⁸ Beserra claims that Nordestinos hold an “inferior” position in Brazilian society not because of any “inherent characteristic” but based on the fact that Nordestinos occupy an inferior position as exploited laborers in the urban centers of the Central South.

Recent scholarship on regionalism in Brazil has focused on the early part of the twentieth century when ideas about the modern nation were highly contested, politically, economically and culturally. Urbanization, industrialization and modernism challenged the previous dictum of Brazil being “an essentially agrarian

Duke University Press, 2000); Mary Roldán, *Blood and Fire: La Violencia in Antioquia, Colombia, 1946-1953* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

⁶⁶ Nancy P. Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt, “Introduction: Racial Nations,” *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*, eds. Nancy P. Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 10.

⁶⁷ Barbara Weinstein, “Brazilian Regionalism,” *Latin American Research Review* 17:2 (1982), 262-276.

⁶⁸ Beserra, “Introduction,” 6. See also, Francisco de Oliveira, *Elegia para uma re(li)gião: Sudene, Nordeste Planejamento e Conflitos de Classes*. (Rio: Paz e Terra, 1977).

country,”⁶⁹ but as scholars have argued, many nineteenth century ideologies – such as scientific racism – were carried over into the first half of the twentieth century and influenced the construction of regional identity within the modern nation. For instance, Barbara Weinstein examines the elite construction of São Paulo in the 1930s, arguing that Paulistas approached the national narrative of racial democracy by constructing São Paulo as the white, modern center of Brazil, by marginalizing the role of Afro-Brazilians in the construction of the nation, and by Othering Northeastern Brazil as backwards and non-civilized.⁷⁰

Stanley Blake also looks at regional identity formation in the early twentieth century by examining how Northeastern Brazil was defined in relation to the Brazilian nation.⁷¹ Blake argues that by the 1930s, “Nordestino” was a separate racialized category in Brazil that allowed social scientists, politicians and intellectuals to make racialized distinctions without referring to a specific ethnicity. This was evident in the types of social reform programs initiated in Northeastern Brazil in the 1930s. For instance, politicians and social scientists blamed the region’s high infant mortality rates and malnutrition rates on the inherent incapacity of Northeastern

⁶⁹ This common statement probably arose during the Old Republic (1889-1930), related to Liberal planter groups arguing for government funding to be allotted to the agrarian sector versus industrial development. The idea was also commonly invoked by Juscelino Kubitschek (1956 – 1961) who stated that Brazil was no longer an essentially agrarian country to support projects for rapid industrialization.

⁷⁰ Barbara Weinstein, “Racializing Regional Difference: São Paulo versus Brazil, 1932,” *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*, eds. Nancy Appelbaum, Anne Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 235-262. In terms of cultural production, Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Júnior also sees the “invention” of the Northeast as being in a dialectical relationship with São Paulo and the urban center-south.

⁷¹ Stanley Earl Blake, “The Invention of the *Nordestino*: Race, Region, and Identity in Northeastern Brazil, 1889-1945” (Ph.D. diss., SUNY-Stony Brook, 2001).

mothers to raise and care for their children instead of on political and economic inequalities.⁷² While such characterizations of Nordestinos in the 1930s reflect positivist legacies and racialized nationalist assumptions of the 1930s such as racial democracy, what is interesting is that such depictions do not disappear from the definition of *o Nordeste*. In fact, with the privileged place of social science as a way to understand and solve the problem of “poverty” during the Cold War, allowed social indicators and statistics to flourish as the way to describe Northeastern Brazil and Nordestinos.⁷³

While the idea of the Northeast as the impoverished and backwards Other resonates throughout the scholarship on the region,⁷⁴ one of the other key themes of Northeastern identity is resistance. This is to say, many scholars also focus on discussing the long history of resistance in the Northeast that forms a part of the imagined landscape and people. Hamilton de Mattos Monteiro, for instance, argues that the Northeast is a product of a long history of rebellions and resistance movements, especially in the nineteenth century when the region was on the “banks

⁷² Ibid., 184-186.

⁷³ As Arturo Escobar argued, developmentalism prioritized descriptions of the “Third World” as “statistical figures” and dehumanizing abstract representations. Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 42-44.

⁷⁴ For instance, Carlos Garcia, *O que é o Nordeste Brasileiro* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1984); Laércio Souto Maior, *São os nordestinos uma minoria racial?* (Londrina, 1985); Maura Penna, *O que faz ser Nordestino: Identidades sociais, interesses e o “escândolo” Erundina*. (São Paulo: Cortez Editora, 1992); Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Iná Elias de Castro, *O mito da necessidade: Discurso e prática do regionalismo nordestino* (Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil, 1992); Tobias Hecht, *At Home on the Street: Street Children of Northeast Brazil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

of revolutionary effervescence” with the Praieira Rebellion (1848-1850).⁷⁵ Biorn Maybury-Lewis argues that a significant rural labor movement was able to develop during the military regime in the Northeast because of what he defined as a “culture of resistance” that had developed in the region throughout the colonial period and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While Beserra argues that this type of “re-invention” of the Northeast has been a more recent trend to promote tourism, the ways in which social movements elaborated upon this facet of Nordestino identity in the 1950s and 1960s shows how the notion of resistance and rebellion attempted to radically transform the region.⁷⁶

The topic of how regionalism fits into the paradigm of modernization theory is one of the key themes in understanding Cold War history. Celia Applegate argues that according to modernization theory, regions should have disappeared as political and economic areas when the region became integrated into national markets and when state institutions developed, ceding greater power to national institutions, national political parties and electoral processes.⁷⁷ As nations developed, a sense of nationalism should have also expanded, fostered by state-led initiatives for the development of industry and the development of national culture, “expressed in a

⁷⁵ Hamilton de Mattos Monteiro, *Nordeste insurgente (1850-1890)* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1981).

⁷⁶ Beserra, “Introduction,” 8. Beserra argues that the “new” stereotypes of the Northeast further ideas of the Northeast as “exotic,” “wild” and “backwards.” As she claims, “the memory and practice of day-to-day resistance and protest are dissolved in a submissive pasteurization that hinders the feeding of any dream of a more radical transformation.” What is missing from Beserra’s argument is the historical analysis of how and why this version of Northeastern resistance exists. To understand this, it is necessary to understand the transformation of regional identity by the rural social movements of the 1950s and 1960s and the military government’s reaction to these social movements.

⁷⁷ Applegate, “A Europe of Regions,” 1157-1182.

common language, disseminated through educational and artistic institutions, and represented in all manner of central monuments, rituals and common experiences.”⁷⁸

After World War II, social science methodologies changed how history was produced, thematically and methodologically.⁷⁹ This led to a proliferation of studies on urban history, the place in the nation where modernity could most easily be located. Meanwhile, challenges to modernization theory claimed that underdevelopment was not simply a state of transition but an integrated part of modern society, and the persistence of regionalist loyalties and regional uprisings indicated that regionalism was still a crucial subject of historical inquiry. While Applegate’s arguments show the relation between the production of history, modernization theory and regionalism in Europe, the persistence of regionalism during the Cold War has a different significance in the context of the Third World.⁸⁰

It is important to rethink the historiography on regionalism during the Cold War by looking at the Third World to understand the connection between regionalism, nationalism, modernization theory and Cold War history.

Modernization theory played a significant role in shaping policies and state development institutions in Brazil. Regional development was key to developmentalist policies and programs since regions were seen as enclaves of

⁷⁸ Ibid., 1163.

⁷⁹ Applegate draws from the work by Sidney Pollard, *Peaceful Conquest: The Industrialization of Europe, 1760-1970* (New York, 1981) in how his work uses Alexander Gerschenkron, W.W. Rostow and Simon Kuznets; and, John Agnew and James Duncan, *The Power of Place: Bringing Together Geographical and Sociological Imaginations* (Winchester, Mass., 1989). Applegate, “A Europe of Regions,” 1163.

⁸⁰ Although the term “Third World” suggests an Othering in itself, I choose to use the word because it was the term used during this period to refer to “developing” nations and because many movements themselves used this term to declare solidarity.

underdevelopment that needed to develop to fit into the modern nation.⁸¹ As Nils Gilman argues in *Mandarins of the Future*, by the late 1950s, modernization theorists such as Lucian Pye constructed arguments about why underdeveloped countries were at risk for Communism.⁸² In “traditional” societies embarking upon the transition to modernization, people supposedly felt unsure about the future, materially and psychologically. Modernization theorists argued that the Communist Party took advantage of this unstable transitory period. W.W. Rostow and other modernization theorists argued that the only way to prevent the threat of a Communist “take-over” was to provide immediate economic aid and development to underdeveloped countries and regions, making the passage to modern society as rapid and safe as possible.⁸³

At the same time that Modernization theorists depicted regional culture as a manifestation of the traditional past and swept up in a process of inevitable transformation to modernity, this was not the only explanation or reason for the increased significance of the regional during the Cold War. A number of scholars and journalists in Northeastern Brazil started discussing the limits to modernization, evolution and development in Northeastern Brazil in the 1950s and 1960s, suggesting that Northeastern Brazil was a product of “internal colonization.”⁸⁴ As Regina Reyes

⁸¹ Chapter Four further details the influence of modernization theory in shaping the policies and programs for Northeastern development.

⁸² Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 167-168.

⁸³ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁴ In a conversation, Governor Gilberto Mestrinho stated that “there is much talk of foreign colonialism, but in Brazil there is a Brazilian colonialism reaching from the South [into the North].” Cited in L.A. Costa Pinto and Waldemiro Bazzanella, “Economic Development, Social Change, and Population Problems in Brazil,” in

Novaes argues, toward the end of the 1950s and with the drought of 1958, “all of Brazil started to consider the Northeast as a plundered region, underdeveloped, colonized, an Other Brazil.”⁸⁵ Social scientists such as Fernando Enrique Cardoso worked gathering data on Northeastern Brazil in the early 1960s, even conducting research at the Engenho Galiléia, developing arguments later elaborated on in Enzo Faletto and Fernando Enrique Cardoso’s *Development and Dependency in Latin America* (1969). Other arguments portrayed the regional as containing authentic nationalism and social actors used such depictions to mobilize people against what was seen as foreign imperialism or left-over manifestations of colonialism.

A historical examination of how modernization theories and dependency theories conceptualized ideas of the region of Northeastern Brazil provides a way to understand the connection between the development and implementation of theory and regional identity in Brazil during the Cold War. But, as Peter Sinclair has argued, these theories lack the depth to explain regionalism and to understand regional disparities.⁸⁶ Whereas the study of nations and nationalism has produced a wealth of theories, the study of regionalism still lacks this type of analysis. In part this is due to the vagueness of regions, which do not have the same connection to a central state or even strictly defined borders as nations. But, in its fluidity, similar to studies of the

Irving Louis Horowitz, *Revolution in Brazil: Politics and Society in a Developing Nation* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, Inc., 1964), 260.

⁸⁵ “O Brasil inteiro passa a pensar o Nordeste como região espolida, subdesenvolvida, colonizada, um outro Brasil,” Regina Reyes Novaes, *De Corpo e Alma: Catolicismo, classes sociais e conflitos no campo* (Rio de Janeiro: Graphia, 1997), 31.

⁸⁶ Peter R. Sinclair, “Poor Regions, Poor Theory: Toward Improved Understanding of Regional Inequality,” *Appalachia in an International Context: Cross-National Comparisons of Developing Regions*, eds., Phillip Obermiller and William Philliber (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1994), 187-207. Sinclair argues: “Poor regions are ill served by poor theory.”

frontier or borderlands, it is possible to locate meanings and definitions of identity and power, related to the region, the nation, and in the case of Northeastern Brazil, the Third World. To do this, we need to eschew the routine separation of questions about culture, political power and economic inequality. A broader study that combines the cultural, political and economic ways in which Northeastern Brazil was constructed during the Cold War will show how all of these factors created new ideas of Northeastern Brazil and Nordestinos and of Brazilian national identity.

Such an analysis requires not only an examination of how social scientists and social movements define the region of the Northeast but also how mass culture created an immediately attainable visual narrative of the Northeast for local, national and global consumption. Filmmakers drew up on previously established representations of the Northeast in film, literature and popular culture, while also adopting new aesthetics and techniques for manufacturing what they called a “realistic” and “non-exotic” depiction of the Third World. The political and commercial filmmakers of the Cold War era in Brazil departed from the recently defunct studio system and created films – many focused on the Northeast – that also defined Brazilian national cinema during this period. These films reproduced regional historical symbols and narratives, relying on common stereotypes or “markings” that immediately identified the region as the Northeast. A study of the dialectical process of regional and national identity formation in Brazil in the late 1950s and 1960s must evaluate the ways in which regional symbols were appropriated in popular culture as well as in the political culture.

The remainder of this chapter looks at how the Northeast was designated as a key region of the Third World by actors as diverse as the U.S. government, the Ligas Camponesas, the Communist Party, and Cinema Novo directors. Following this, I describe the relationship of Northeastern Brazil with the Brazilian nation during this period, and finally I examine how certain ideas of the Northeast developed during the early 1960s and influenced the definitions of the Northeast during the military regime. I discuss how the Ligas Camponesas, the Pernambucan mainstream newspaper *O Diário de Pernambuco*, and US agencies and journalists defined Northeastern Brazil. Also crucial for understanding the definition of *o Nordeste* is the development agency SUDENE and the Instituto de Pesquisas Sociais Joaquim Nabuco, a social science research foundation established in 1948 in Recife directed by Gilberto Freyre. Through an examination of the topics and projects supported by these institutions, it is possible to see how social scientists and policymakers defined Northeastern Brazil. I look at the major themes that came out of these definitions that reflect larger political debates and how Northeastern Brazil was central to these debates. These include the issue of authenticity and who has the right to define Northeastern Brazil; foreign imperialism or anti-Americanism, nationalism, and Third World transnationalism; how history was used to define Northeastern identity; and, issues related to modernization theory such as backwardness, feudalism, and poverty.

A Third World Region of the Cold War – The U.S. and Northeastern Brazil

It is not necessary to repeat here how often the Brazilian Northeast has been alleged to constitute a “danger zone,” a seat of “communist revolutionary ferment,” a fervid locus of *fidelismo*, or even the possible site of “another progressive socialist revolution” in Latin

America. The Northeast is, in newspaper, journal, and magazine, virtually identified with Brazil, the axiom appearing to be, “As the Northeast goes, so goes Brazil.”⁸⁷

And yet it is necessary to “repeat here” the common perceptions of Northeastern Brazil held by the US government and by foreign journalists in the early 1960s because the socialist revolution never occurred and the period of revolutionary ferment simply faded into obscurity after the military coup of 1964, along with the importance of Northeastern Brazil as a key site of international Cold War politics. Anthropologist Anthony Leeds wrote this article in 1964 with the intention of countering commonly held perceptions of Northeastern Brazil. He argued that the Ligas Camponesas were not a significant national movement and the Northeast itself held much less importance in national politics than the foreign media and politicians claimed that it held.⁸⁸ Similarly Ruth Leacock argued, “most Brazilians, unlike the

⁸⁷ Anthony Leeds, “Brazil and the Myth of Francisco Julião,” *Politics of Change in Latin America* ed., Joseph Maier and Richard W. Weatherhead (Prager Publishing Company, 1964), 190.

⁸⁸ As a graduate student, Anthony Leeds was one of four graduate students involved in Charles Wagley’s UNESCO race studies in Brazil in the early 1950s. Leeds lived in Uraçuca, Bahia, a small town in the Cacau region where the Communist Party was weak. This may have influenced his perspective of the Ligas Camponesas and why he saw them as being disconnected from the rural workers. He thought the Communist Party was “pitiful” in that it had a great opportunity to organize the rural workers but failed to execute any meaningful political plan. According to Leeds, the Communist Party was “lacking in vision, in discipline, in organization, and in common sense.” As he wrote in a report on the Communist Party in 1951, “The CP here is unaware of the issues it should be fighting for, it has no program except AGAINST, it has, as far as I have been able to find out, no activity worthy of it, and no organizational or, above all, educational program, the most important thing for Brazil in general, for any program of action in general and for the CP in particular. If they had such a program and could convince the people of its use which would not be hard, they would shoot ahead (at least on the education front).” Anthony Leeds Papers – Cacau Zone of Brazil, Box 24. Folder: “Relatorios, Brazil, 1951” Relatorio on Brazilian Communists, July 15, 1951, National Anthropological Archives, Suitland, MD. At the time of writing this article, Leeds was involved in a study of the

Americans, simply did not consider the solution of the problems of the drought-stricken, agrarian Northeast as the most pressing set of problems facing their country.”⁸⁹ The question remains as to why the U.S. perceived Northeastern Brazil as generating or constituting Brazilian politics and the trajectory of the Brazilian nation in the early 1960s. I argue that this can only be answered by examining the importance of regionalism in the Third World during the Cold War.

U.S. government policies during the late 1950s and early 1960s were premised on certain assumptions that led policymakers to the conclusion that Northeastern Brazil was a key area of concern. In a condensed version, these premises were: 1. Poverty and “traditional” societies are the breeding ground for socialist revolution; 2. Anti-Americanism means pro-Communism; 3. Latin American governments are incapable of handling such problems adequately and the U.S. knows best. Although the U.S. government started development and aid programs, their main concern was how to win the hearts and minds of Nordestinos to prevent the spread of Communism. While this was an overarching goal of most foreign missions

favelas in Rio de Janeiro, and may have been influenced by Governor Carlos Lacerda’s claims that the “real” communist threat was not the Northeast, but the urban slums, a political argument which enabled Lacerda to obtain greater funding from the Alliance for Progress.

⁸⁹ Ruth Leacock, *Requiem for Revolution: The United States and Brazil, 1961-1969* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1990), 64-65. This opinion was also stated in: Brazil. U.S. Embassy. Classified General Records, 1941-1963. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State. “The Brazilian Northeast: A Status Report on Politico-Economic Conditions,” Foreign Service of the U.S. Government Confidential Dispatch from the American Embassy of Rio de Janeiro to the Department of State, 19 December 1961, RG 84, Box 126, Folder: Northeast 1961, p.13. National Archives. “Most Brazilians do not believe that such a mass revolution could occur. The normally pacific and lazy nature of the Nordeste is always cited. Even the point that the Nordeste is much too busy avoiding starvation to worry about revolution is frequently stressed.”

and policies during the 1950s and 1960s, the approach differed depending on the region of the world and the country. In this section, I briefly describe how these premises influenced U.S. depictions of Northeastern Brazil in the U.S. media, policies and in the documented perceptions of U.S. officials in Recife during the 1950s and 1960s.

Even though numerous scholars and journalists have claimed that Northeastern Brazil was only “rediscovered” by the United States in October of 1960 with the first reports in *The New York Times* about the Ligas Camponesas, a number of development and aid programs had been established in the mid-1950s, including the United Nations Bank of the Northeast (BNB) in June 1954, and aid programs for drought relief in 1958. A 1960 report, “Northeast Brazil Revisited” about the Bank of the Northeast stated that regional thinking on the problems of Northeastern Brazil had changed since the establishment of the Bank. Before 1954, “the economic thinking of the region was the complete monopoly of the poets and politicians, and all of the public discussion was in emotional and negative terms.”⁹⁰ In the six years between the establishment of the bank and the filing of the report, “the Northeast has seen a revolution in regional thinking on economic development.”⁹¹ This was attributed to the newer ideas about development such as training technical workers and investing in human resources, plans for financing small industries, and the establishment and coordination between regional and state development agencies. Robock explained that:

⁹⁰ Stefan H. Robock, “Northeast Brazil Revisited: Report on the Technical Mission of Stefan Robock,” July 1960, 6.

⁹¹ Ibid., 7.

The political representatives of Northeast Brazil continue to emphasize the poverty and misery in the region to secure increased federal funds for the area. But I was most impressed with the remarkable progress achieved in the Northeast since 1956. Northeast Brazil, with its population of twenty million, is still the major underdeveloped region in the Western Hemisphere but the Northeast is now on the move.

In the capital cities people are much better dressed, transportation by donkeys has given way largely to trucks and motor scooters, retail stores have been modernized and even the number of beggars seems to have declined. These visual impressions, in my opinion, are even more reliable than the precarious official statistics.

The shining optimism manifested throughout the report praising the possibility for certain types of development and progress in Northeastern Brazil is heavily laden with ideas of modernization theory and a vision of modernity connected to the American way of life. What is interesting about the above statement is the fact that Robock, an economist and proponent of modernization theory, chose to portray modernization culturally and not rely upon the social science indicators, which continued to reflect the extreme poverty of the area. This apparent contradiction forms the core of modernization theory in practice: social “science” ideology based on cultural assumptions and stereotypes of “traditional” Third World societies. The premise found in the Robock report is similar to the premise of the Alliance for Progress in that if the symbols of modernity (or the American Way of Life) are introduced, this will bring democracy and thwart the spread of communism.

At the same time, a few different reports from the American Consul General in Recife expressed the concern about the presence of Americans in Northeastern Brazil as strengthening regional identity and anti-American sentiment. In a letter to Ambassador Lincoln Gordon from one of the sixteen Vice Consuls at the American Consul General in Recife, Lowell Kilday expressed his concerns about the

establishment of the largest U.S. AID office in the world in Recife because of the presence of Americans (and the “American Way of Life”) in Recife. As he wrote:

Northeasterners generally, including natives of Recife, tend to view foreigners with a certain amount of distrust and suspicion in a way rather reminiscent of some of our own provincial cities and towns in an earlier age. The rapid expansion of the official American family in Recife – it has more than tripled within the past year – has not occurred unnoticed and is frequently the source of caustic comment and raised eyebrow. It is also the cause of some suspicion even among those who would be our friends. To continue with this expansion, or to increase it suddenly or sharply, I fear, will severely strain the narrow tolerance of Recife’s provincialism. Further, I think it possible that a sudden sizeable increase in the number of official American families – each understandably enjoying the comfort of a new automobile and a standard of living, which by local comparisons is extremely high and rather glaringly sets us apart – could serve to stir and sharpen the resentments of the impoverished classes. In this connection, I think it important to point out that of the fifty or sixty 1962 model American cars in Recife, only two or three belong to Brazilians. Finally the creation of a huge AID mission in Recife, it seems to me, will present a very easy target for effective attack by the new state government, which is likely to be quite hostile, and by other extreme leftist, anti-American elements.⁹² (1)

Similar reports were filed with the U.S. Embassy expressing a concern about the

show of wealth and the strong American presence.⁹³ U.S. consular officials

understood the difference between American access to symbols of the American way

of life and Nordestinos access to these material symbols. In the expanding milieu of

⁹² Brazil. U.S. Embassy. Classified General Records, 1941-1963. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State. Letter to Lincoln Gordon from Lowell C. Kilday, American Vice Consul. Dec 3, 1962. RG 84, Box 136, Folder 500 A.I.D. National Archives.

⁹³ “The presense of numerous well-fed and well-housed Americans has given a natural impetus to anti-American sentiments. The presence of American commercial activities and the preponderance of American brand names on the local market have given the Nordestino a complex (fed by the leftists) about American economic ‘imperialism.’” Brazil. U.S. Embassy. Classified General Records, 1941-1963. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State. Foreign Service of the U.S. Government Confidential Dispatch, from the American Embassy of Rio de Janeiro to the Department of State, “The Brazilian Northeast: A Status Report on Politico-Economic Conditions,” 19 December 1961. RG 84; Box 126, Folder: Northeast 1961, p.12. National Archives.

anti-imperialist or anti-colonialist discourse, consular officials realized the danger of being perceived as “imperialists,” and the danger of linking imperialism to the traditional elite. Such a perception was understood as threatening “positive” efforts to bring modernity and development projects to the Northeast. These perceptions also exemplify the other main objective of U.S. officials in the Northeast: preventing the spread of communism. Regional identity and regional poverty were seen as dangerous and unstable areas that had to be resolved to prevent a Cuban-style revolution.

Descriptions of Northeastern Brazil in the U.S. media linked its poverty to the threat of social revolution. The first article on the Ligas Camponesas that appeared in *The New York Times* is representative of the type of coverage that followed. The article, by Tad Szulc, starts:

The makings of a revolutionary situation are increasingly apparent across the vastness of the poverty-stricken and drought-plagued Brazilian Northeast. In the area 20,000,000 people live on average annual incomes of less than \$100. Racked by cronic malnutrition and rampaging disease, they seldom live much beyond the age of thirty.

The misery is exploited by the rising Leftist influences in the overcrowded cities. The Communist-infiltrated Peasant Leagues, organizing and indoctrinating, have become an important political factor in this area.

Cuba’s Premier, Fidel Castro, and Mao Tse-tung, Communist China’s party chairman, are being presented as heroes to be imitated by the Northeast’s peasants, workers and students.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Tad Szulc, “Northeast Brazil Poverty Breeds Threat of a Revolt,” *The New York Times*, 31 October 1961, 1. Szulc met with Brazilian journalist Antônio Callado in Rio before going to Northeastern Brazil and in a meeting with Callado and Philip Raine, Political Counselor of the U.S. Embassy in Rio, Szulc said he was sent by the *New York Times* to write an article on “Fidelismo” in Latin America and had decided to focus on the Ligas Camponesas. Brazil. U.S. Embassy. Classified General Records, 1941-1963. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State. Confidential Memorandum to Files. 17 October 1960. RG 84, Box 126, Folder 350.21 Communism 1960. National Archives.

The article continues to discuss the development projects initiated by the Brazilian government, raising questions about the precariousness of the projects because of the growing revolutionary ferment and widespread poverty. Szulc listed the social indicators – 75 percent of the population is illiterate, average daily caloric intake is 1,644 calories, life expectancy is 28 for men and 32 for women, half the population dies before the age of thirty, and hookworm, schistosomiasis (water-borne parasitic disease) and tuberculosis flourish in the Northeast. He quoted a top official in Recife who warned: “If the Brazilian Northeast is lost to you Americans, the Cuban Revolution will have been a picnic by comparison.” Julião also was quoted as engaging with US foreign policy in Northeastern Brazil, quoted as saying, “The big landowners backed by United States imperialism are sucking our blood.”

Northeastern Brazil and the Ligas Camponesas suddenly became a newsworthy topic after this initial report, with lengthy articles in *The New York Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Washington Post*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report*, to name a few. In most of the articles, Northeastern Brazil is characterized as extremely poor and seething in revolutionary sentiment because of the poverty and because of the history of Communism and rebellion. Journalists covered visits to Northeastern Brazil by US politicians, such as George McGovern (director of Food for Peace) and Arthur Schlesinger (presidential assistant), emphasizing the poverty such officials observed: “In one mud-walled mocambo, 14 persons were assembled including spindle-legged stunted children with

protruding abdomens.”⁹⁵ Numerous articles tied the poverty to regional unrest by securing the knot in the history of Northeastern Brazil. These articles spoke of the long history of rebellion, mysticism and Communism in the region.⁹⁶

As U.S. journalists and politicians turned toward the enclaves of underdevelopment and poverty in the Third World, they criticized national governments of the Third World for not paying enough attention to regional problems. In 1961, after the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Kennedy Administration launched the Alliance for Progress, a development program allocating resources, aid, and loans to Latin America to promote development and to fight communism. The U.S. and Brazil signed the Alliance for Progress agreements on 13 April 1962, committing \$276,000,000 to development projects in Northeastern Brazil. The U.S. Agency for International Development (U.S. AID) stated that this funding and these development projects were “an alternative to violent change” in the region.⁹⁷ But, this funding had a number of problems from its inception. One such problem was how the U.S. understood political alternatives in Latin America. The Kennedy Administration saw only three possibilities for Latin American countries in 1961: a

⁹⁵ Robert H. Estabrook, “Brazil Misery Stuns Visitors,” *The Washington Post* 20 February 1961, 6.

⁹⁶ For example, “The Brazilian Northeast has a tradition of rebellion and of a special kind of mysticism. In the past it has made folk heroes of Father Cícero, a priest who fought for peasants’ rights and of Lampião, a local Robin Hood who defied whole army regiments as he galloped up and down the region thirty years ago, robbing from the rich and sometimes giving to the poor. It is from this tradition that Julião and his league, using the peasant’s hoe as their symbol, draw their strength.” Tad Szulc, “Castro Tries to Export ‘Fidelismo’” *The New York Times Magazine*, 27 November 1960, 19.

In other articles the history of Communism is emphasized: “Pernambuco is known for political unrest and endemic Communist activity.” Robert H. Estabrook, “Brazil Misery Stuns Visitors,” *The Washington Post* 20 February 1961, 6.

⁹⁷ “Brazil Signs Pact for Alliance Aid,” *The New York Times* 14 April 1962, 3.

Cuban-style revolution, dictatorship or authoritarian regimes, or democratic regimes. A Cuban-style revolution was considered the option to avoid at all costs, which limited the options to either democracy or dictatorship. As Howard Wiarda argues, this dichotomous view of options for Latin American countries hindered the ability for Latin American leaders to find their own solutions, and led to the repressive military regimes in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s.⁹⁸

Another major connected problem with the Alliance for Progress was the United States' perspective of Latin America as backwards, irrational, unstable and incompetent. As Wiarda argues, the Alliance for Progress was based on the idea that "it was we [U.S.] who knew best and who would presumably bring the benefits of our civilization to Latin America."⁹⁹ In 1961, Brazilian president Jânio Quadros tried to follow a political line of "independence," establishing relations with Cuba, the Soviet Union, China and the United States. The U.S. interpreted Quadros's unexpected

⁹⁸ Howard J. Wiarda, "Did the Alliance 'Lose Its Way,' or Were Its Assumptions All Wrong from the Beginning and Are Those Assumptions Still with Us?" *The Alliance for Progress: A Retrospective*, ed. L. Ronald Scheman (New York, Praeger, 1988), 107-108.

Greg Grandin also points out that this polarity defined US-Latin American relations during the Cold War. As he writes in the preface to *The Last Colonial Massacre*, "terror had the effect of, first, radicalizing society to produce febrile political polarization and, second, destroying the more capacious, social understandings of democracy that prevailed in the years around World War II." Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), xv.

⁹⁹ Wiarda, "Did the Alliance 'Lose Its Way,' 104.

Another example of the U.S. government's mistrust of the ability of Brazilians to elect officials that best represented the country is in the fact that the U.S. government helped to fund campaigns of the preferred officials. According to Michael Weis, the CIA helped to fund campaigns of 15 federal Senate seats, 8 state governorships, 250 federal deputy seats, and over 600 seats for state legislatures through the front of IPES/IBAD. W. Michael Weis, *Cold Warriors and Coups D'Etat: Brazilian-American Relations, 1945-1964* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 156.

resignation in August 1961, as a clear sign of Brazil's incompetence, political immaturity, and irrationality. After Quadros's resignation, U.S. journalists labeled him "emotionally unbalanced," as "someone giving an imitation of Charlie Chaplin giving an imitation of Hitler," and a manic-depressed leader "obsessed with power and sex."¹⁰⁰ While Quadros may indeed have not been stable psychologically, the representations deserve attention since he was depicted as a combination of the symbols of comedy and evil, along with the frequently employed description of Latin American leaders being "obsessed with power and sex," a phrase used to describe everyone from Salvador Allende to Manuel Noriega. Even the well-respected economist and director of SUDENE, Celso Furtado, was alluded to being a Communist or Marxist-influenced economist,¹⁰¹ and SUDENE faced criticism by US AID officials who argued that the agency housed communists and was inefficient in executing the AID projects. U.S. politicians and journalist justified the need for U.S. sponsored development projects and studies, described as superior to any similar projects and studies coming from Brazil.¹⁰² This also validated why the U.S. could

¹⁰⁰ Louis L. Winitzer, "Which Revolution for Brazil? Quadros Returns to a Country in Chaos," *The New Republic* 19 March 1962, 19.

¹⁰¹ Newspaper reports often associated Furtado with Miguel Arraes and the "leftist" politicians in Northeastern Brazil. As stated in Foreign Service of the U.S. Government Confidential Dispatch, from the American Embassy of Rio de Janeiro to the Department of State, "The Brazilian Northeast: A Status Report on Politico-Economic Conditions," 19 December 1961: "Many believe that Celso Furtado will – when the moment is opportune – reveal his true and continuing allegiance to the communist cause. These persons believe that SUDENE is a well designed vehicle for the planned Communist takeover of the Northeast." Brazil. U.S. Embassy. Classified General Records, 1941-1963. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State. RG 84; Box 126, Folder: Northeast 1961, p.12. National Archives.

¹⁰² In a series of reports by Ralph Nader for the *Christian Science Monitor* in 1963, Nader described the Brazilian reaction to U.S. training and aid programs, listing among the failures the lack of communication between SUDENE and US AID

see Northeastern Brazil as the crucial issue in Brazilian politics, even though Brazilians seemed focused elsewhere: Brazilian politicians were too “irrational” to see the problems of the Northeast as the major source of concern.

As the “major underdeveloped region in the Western Hemisphere,” Northeastern Brazil became a focus for US developmental policies and programs, which started in the 1950s but took off in the early 1960s. The solutions proposed were based on modernization theories, emphasizing the need to fight communism in Latin America, “not with armed force but with the kind of economic aid that proceeds from science and proper understanding.”¹⁰³ Such programs included continued development projects sponsored by the United Nations, loans from the Inter-American Development Bank, the U.S. Food for Peace program, the United Nations Children’s Fund, and the Alliance for Progress.¹⁰⁴ Cooperative training and research programs took place between a number of U.S. universities in Northeastern Brazil, including a UCLA study in Ceará on economic development (1961-five year program) funded by the Organization of American States, the Bank of Northeastern Brazil, the Ford Foundation and the University of California. Many U.S. government

officials (language barrier, 90 percent of AID lack Portuguese skills), AID workers sitting around their office watching the time pass, and quoted Gilberto Freyre as criticizing the AID workers who he felt had “an appalling ignorance of objective conditions and prevailing psychologies.” Ralph Nader, “US Agency Under Fire: Brazil Aid Effort Rapped,” *The Christian Science Monitor* 7 September 1963.

¹⁰³ “The ‘Fidelistas’ of Brazil” *The New York Times*, 1 November 1960, 38.

¹⁰⁴ In April 1962, Brazil and the United States entered into a discussion about the allocation of Alliance for Progress funds. The U.S. offered \$276,000,000, rejected at first by Brazil because of U.S. restrictions placed on this money, but an agreement was signed on 13 April 1962. The funds were slated for developing “Brazil’s perennially depressed and politically unstable Northeast section” and the U.S. contributed \$131,000,000 and Brazil \$145,000,000. “Brazil Signs Pact for Alliance Aid,” *The New York Times* 14 April 1962, 3.

studies on the social and economic problems of Northeastern Brazil took place in the early 1960s, including the Merwin Bohan report (January 1962). Other studies were sponsored by private foundations, such as the three-year study on social and economic problems sponsored by the Korvette Foundation (Woolworths) and led by Charles Wagley of Columbia University's Latin American Studies Center. As Margaret Boardman argues, the U.S. government turned to private institutions to fund projects for Latin American development and the expansion of US capitalism, a policy initiative started during the Truman Administration.¹⁰⁵ AIA, the American International Association for Economic and Social Development, was one such program that started in 1946 in Brazil and Venezuela with funding from the Rockefeller Institution to promote rural development. In general, these research studies and development projects drew from a simplistic vision of Brazil as a "traditional" society that needed development and modernization to transform, but failed to engage with the depth of the problems or take into consideration the difficulties in implementing solutions.

The shortcomings of the Alliance for Progress in Northeastern Brazil are most evident when examining the issue of agrarian reform, perhaps the most heated but also most difficult issue to resolve in Latin America during the Cold War. The inequitable land tenure system was viewed as one of the most pressing issues in Latin America, linked to associated problems of rural illiteracy, the lack of technical training for small farmers, and the threat of a Cuban-style revolution. Northeastern Brazil was the most inequitable area in Latin America, a place where a few landlords

¹⁰⁵ Margaret C. Boardman, " 'The Man, The Girl and the Jeep' AIA: Nelson Rockefeller's Precursor Non-Profit Model for Private U.S. Foreign Aid," <http://www.isop.ucla.edu/profmex/volume6/1winter01/01boardman1.htm>

owned most of land and the majority of rural people had no property. In August 1961, a meeting of the OAS took place in Punta del Este, Uruguay, in which all American nations except Cuba signed a charter for the Alliance for Progress that made the following statement about agrarian reform:

To encourage (...) programs of comprehensive agrarian reform leading to the effective transformation, where required, of unjust structures and systems of land tenure and use, with a view to replace latifundia and dwarf-holdings by an equitable system of land tenure so that, with the help of timely and adequate credit, technical assistance and facilities for the marketing and distribution of products, the land will become for the man who works it the basis of his economic stability, the foundation of his increasing welfare, and the guarantee of his freedom and dignity.

Declarations for land reform were hopeful but naïve, lacking solid plans and projects and not considering the great infrastructural barriers and financial resources needed for the execution of agrarian reform programs.

In a 1962 Congressional hearing, Peter Nehemkis Jr. (*Latin America: Myth and Reality*, 1964) ranked Brazil as one of the key countries for the Alliance for Progress, arguing that the Northeast is “the real testing ground for the Alliance for Progress. If the northeast explodes, Cuba will seem like a firecracker by comparison.”¹⁰⁶ Nehemkis suggested that current attempts to bring the symbols of modernity, such as putting drinking fountains in town squares, were not the best form of fighting communism. Instead, he proposed massive literacy campaigns and programs of land redistribution similar to the Tennessee Valley Authority. But, as

¹⁰⁶ Congress, Joint Economic Committee, *Economic Developments in South America: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Inter-American Economic Relationships of the Joint Economic Committee Congress of the United States*, 87th Congress, 2nd Session. 10-11 May, 1962, 58-59.

Nehemkis argued in his book, a type of land redistribution program like the Tennessee Valley Authority requires a great deal of money and resources that were largely inaccessible to the majority of Latin American countries, with the possible exception of Venezuela because of oil revenues.

The difficulties of instituting a top-down comprehensive land reform in Brazil were coupled with the growing enthusiasm for Cuba's style of revolutionary agrarian reform. Instead of colonization projects and redistribution cases, the option for land invasions and overthrowing the land tenure system seemed the quickest and easiest way to construct a more equitable society. The only countries in Latin America that had programs of agrarian reform were countries that had experienced revolutions: Mexico, Bolivia, and Cuba.

But, the threat of communism during the Cold War made this, as the Kennedy Administration declared, the option to be avoided at all costs. In many congressional hearings and publications about the Alliance for Progress, US government officials based their understanding of the unrest on poverty and ignorance, stating that people had access to Ché Guevara's *Guerrilla Warfare* handbook, but not the Declaration of Independence. While this is a valid observation, what is missing from the analysis is that people were reading "Guerrilla Warfare" not because it was readily available but because Latin Americans harbored skepticism of the United States' interests in Latin America, seeing it as a part of an imperialist project and because "Guerrilla Warfare" presented a viable option for agrarian reform that made sense to people who lived in areas of the Third World with unequal land tenure and limited financial and political resources.

The Communist threat linked to a Cuban-style revolution and agrarian reform influenced the perception of the Ligas Camponesas and their project for agrarian reform. US journalists drew connections between the Ligas Camponesas, Cuba, China, and even Africa throughout this period. Julião's trips to Cuba, Moscow, and China were frequently reported upon, and Julião was described as a Brazilian Mao Tse-Tung, Lenin, and most frequently, a Brazilian Fidel Castro. For example, drawing from the depiction of the politics of Cuba as Fidelismo, Julião's politics were labeled "Juliãoismo." Frequent reports on the trips to China and Cuba of Ligas participants and leaders appeared in the stories about Northeastern Brazil.¹⁰⁷ In one article in *Newsweek*, Northeastern Brazil was described as a "Texas-sized slum" and Julião as "a deceptively mild-mannered Fidelista who looks forward to the day when he can lead a bloody revolt against the landlords."¹⁰⁸ According to another source, guerrilla training was underway in Northeastern Brazil, and Czech-manufactured arms were found wrapped in Havana newspapers.¹⁰⁹ Djalma Maranhão, mayor of Natal, Rio Grande do Norte, was quoted as saying, "Northeast Brazil today is much like Cuba in the last days before the Castro Revolution."¹¹⁰ And, even though the Nordestinos supposedly only wanted land security and a way to support their

¹⁰⁷ For example, "Among those present was a certain 'Nega Fuba' as he was referred to by other league members. He was a young man in a green shirt who said he as a cobbler. He had returned recently from a trip to Communist China made under circumstances he would not disclose." Juan de Onis, "Brazil Studying Rise of Peasant Leagues as Concern is Aroused Over Violence in Northeast Region," *The New York Times* 10 April 1962, 17.

¹⁰⁸ "Brazil's Goulart: Power For the Sake of What?" *Newsweek* 61:55, 11 March 1963, 55.

¹⁰⁹ Kathleen Walker Seeger, "Brazil's Big Dust Bowl," *The Reader's Digest* 83 (July 1963), 215.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 212.

families, the “communists” were doing their best to light the fuse of a “social explosion unequalled since the Russian Revolution.”¹¹¹

The idea of a communist threat in Brazil was discussed at a Senate Hearing on “The Communist Threat to the U.S. through the Caribbean” in 1959. According to testimony by Joseph Jack Kornfeder, an ex-member of the U.S. Communist Party, the Soviet Communist Party and the Colombian and Venezuelan Communist Parties, Latin American countries were starting a Leninist revolution under the guise of what was entitled a “New Deal Revolution,” which was actually an Anti-American, communist-inspired revolution. Kornfeder argued that since 1954 the Communist Party in Brazil had been involved in a two-stage revolution: first, a “so-called new deal revolution manipulated for their purposes and after they ride into power and succeed to entrench themselves, then the Soviet type of revolution.”¹¹² Discussions

¹¹¹ Ibid., 218.

¹¹² Congress, Senate. Committee on the Judiciary. *Communist Threat to the US through the Caribbean: Hearing before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary*, 86th Cong., 1st sess., 51.

This view was also stated in Foreign Service of the U.S. Government Confidential Dispatch, from the American Embassy of Rio de Janeiro to the Department of State, “The Brazilian Northeast: A Status Report on Politico-Economic Conditions,” 19 December 1961: “All of the ingredients necessary for a revolution are present in the NE; large poverty stricken urban and rural masses, oppressive social conditions, harsh econ and natural conditions, limited opportunities, and a convenient target- the latifundia with its ostentatious elite. But all of these elements have been present during the entire twentieth century history of the area. The one new element (the fuse) is the type of dedicated revolutionary leadership and spirit now present and being developed in the NE. All that is now lacking – theoretically – is the spark to ignite the fuse to detonate the explosive mass. If conditions remain relatively unchanged while the population, social, and economic pressures increase, the explosion will eventually result from some time of spontaneous combustion.” Brazil. U.S. Embassy. Classified General Records, 1941-1963. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State. RG 84, Box 126, Folder: Northeast 1961, p.12-13. National Archives.

of the communist or Cuban threat only intensified after the Cuban Revolution, with a focus placed on the urban slums and the rural Northeast. The next part of this chapter describes how the Ligas Camponesas drew connections between the struggle for land in Northeastern Brazil and Third World and anti-colonial struggles, positioning Northeastern Brazil as a key region engaged in the fight against U.S. imperialism.

The Transnational Connections of the Ligas Camponesas

By 1962, the Ligas Camponesas had taken a decidedly anti-American stance, declaring the United States an enemy of Brazil and of Latin America in their newspaper *LIGA*. The Ligas used cases of U.S. imperialist tactics in Latin America, referring to U.S. actions in Guatemala in 1954 and Puerto Rico. For example, the entry for “Americano” in a series in *LIGA* called “Pequeno Dicionário Prático da Revolução Brasileira, the definition for Americano is those who were born in the Americas, “not to be confused with “ianque,” those born in the United States.¹¹³ According to this dictionary, the Monroe Doctrine had established the theory of “America para os Americanos do Norte” that meant that the U.S. used all means possible to “sink their claws” into Latin America, with exploitation, theft, and piracy. In the name of American solidarity, the Ligas claimed that the United States had continually invaded Latin America, establishing Puerto Rico as a colony, starting internal wars, and overthrowing presidents and replacing them with dictators.

In the case of Brazil and Northeastern Brazil specifically, the Ligas saw the Alliance for Progress and IBAD as manifestations of U.S. imperialism that was

¹¹³ “Pequeno Dicionário Prático da Revolução Brasileira,” *LIGA* 23 January 1963, 2.

supported by the *latifundiarios* (large landowners) and *usineiros* (sugar mill owners). The Ligas claimed the Alliance for Progress was a tool to throw Governor Miguel Arraes out of office by way of a coup, and compared this to the situation in Iraq with Kassem.¹¹⁴ The Ligas connected the Alliance for Progress with the US embassy's IBAD (Brazilian Institute for Democratic Action) and a movement to remove Arraes from office.¹¹⁵ Reports discussed how multinational corporations such as SANBRA and Anderson Clayton were taking over Northeastern industries of cotton, agave, and sisal. Food for Peace and the Alliance for Progress were depicted as “charity” organizations that did little to develop or solve the major problems of Northeastern Brazil. In a political cartoon in *LIGA*, the image showed a small Latin American man giving a piggyback ride to an overweight man labeled “Ajuda Ianque” (U.S. help) with an overstuffed bag of loot.¹¹⁶ As one article stated: “The main target of North American politics, through their various nuances, is not to raise the standard of living of the Nordeste, but to promote the North-American civilization, to disrupt our industrialization, to corrupt our governments and political parties, to further the imposition of their politics of exploitation.”¹¹⁷ In the state of Paraíba, when US

¹¹⁴ Kassem or Abd al-Karim Qasim was Prime Minister of Iraq (1958-1963), who declared himself against British and American military intervention in the Middle East. Qasim was known as the leader of the common Iraqi people, instituting agrarian reform, granting Kurds political freedom, and legalizing the Communist Party. He was killed in 1963, after numerous assassination attempts supposedly supported by the CIA and the British military.

¹¹⁵ “O povo deve estar pronto para tudo: IBAD e Usineiros de Pernambuco preparam o golpe contra o povo,” *LIGA* 10 April 1963, 6.

¹¹⁶ “Perigoso Aliança,” *LIGA* 21 September 1963, 2.

¹¹⁷ “O que visa principalmente a politica norte-americana, através de suas várias nuances, não é o elevamento do modo de vida do nordestino, mas fazer apologia da civilização norte-americana, desviar nossa industrialização, corromper governos e partidos politicos, para melhor aplicação de sua politica de exploração,” Manoel de

Ambassador Lincoln Gordon visited to speak about the Alliance for Progress, he was “welcomed” by protests and signs reading: “Get out Gordon!”¹¹⁸ And, in a memorandum about a visit U.S. journalist Charles Keely, Jr. of Copley News Service made to the Engenho Galiléia in 1962 to meet with the Ligas Camponesas of Galiléia, Keely said that when he asked his three escorts about what they thought of the United States, they replied with a song “about a giant who slept for 200 years and then awoke to discover that he was really only a dwarf drinking Coca-cola made by the giant in whose backyard he found himself.”¹¹⁹

Besides the examples of U.S. imperialist policies and programs in Brazil, the Ligas Camponesas also denounced what they saw as U.S. imperialism in other countries, questioning the type of “Christian Democracy” the U.S. claimed to be exporting. The Ligas declared this was clear in the case of Cuba. Besides international issues, the Ligas also published many articles on the situation of African-Americans in the United States and the Civil Rights Movement. The Ligas related the struggle of the Third World to the place of African-Americans in U.S. society. The argument was that if the U.S. government subjects African-Americans

Jesus, o reporter-camponês, “Penetração imperialista no Nordeste (II) – Os norte-americanos,” *LIGA* 29 May 1963, 3.

¹¹⁸ “Povo paraibano pixou parede contra visita do embaixador ianque,” *LIGA* 5 June 1963, 3.

¹¹⁹ Brazil. U.S. Embassy. Classified General Records, 1941-1963. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, 1962-1963. Memorandum for the files (official use only) Subject: American Newspaper man Attends meeting of Ligas Camponesas. RG 84, Box 136, Folder 500 Northeast. National Archives.

to segregation and places limits on their citizenship, then it was impossible for the U.S. to treat Third World countries with mixed-race populations as equals.¹²⁰

The history of the U.S. military bases in Northeastern Brazil during World War II and the base established on the archipelago off the coast of Northeastern Brazil, Fernando de Noronha, from 1957 to 1962, also influenced the way the Ligas and other Nordestinos understood the United States. With these military bases, people in Northeastern Brazil had personal contact and experience with the U.S. military, creating certain ideas about U.S. power. In 1958, reports came out in the *Diario de Pernambuco* about the “Top Secret” missile base constructed by the US military on Fernando de Noronha, supposedly implementing a system called “MILOS, Missile Impact System Localization.”¹²¹ According to the *Diario de Pernambuco*, three atomic bombs exploded off the coast of Northeastern Brazil in November of 1958, part of “Operation Angus.” Travelers reported seeing explosions that looked like nuclear explosions, fish were dying and Northeastern intellectuals started to question the health of people who lived on the coast due to the effect of radiation. Josué de Castro declared, “We must energetically protest the abusive attitude of the U.S. to use free territories like ours for their macabre experiments with

¹²⁰ The issue of racism in the U.S. became a Cold War issue abroad and domestically. Renee Romano shows how racism in Washington D.C. effected African diplomats and became a foreign policy issue in the early 1960s because of the discrepancy between segregationist domestic policies and the objective of foreign policy to foster U.S. support in the Third World. Renee Romano, “No Diplomatic Immunity: African Diplomats, the State Department, and Civil Rights, 1961-1964,” *The Journal of American History* 87, no. 2 (Sept 2000): 546-579. Frank Füredi argues that the two policies were compatible in that the Cold War period led to a “silencing” of the racial question which led to what he calls “covert” racism. Frank Füredi, *The Silent War*,

¹²¹ *Diario de Pernambuco* 6 August 1958, 4.

weapons of mass destruction.”¹²² Since this allegedly was a “secret” testing, it was difficult to prove and remains murky, but the issue itself shows the skepticism that many Nordestinos felt for the U.S. military and the abuse of power in Northeastern Brazil.

The Ligas Camponesas actively sought connections with other struggles throughout the world including China, the Soviet Union, independence struggles in Africa and Cuba, and other Latin American peasant movements. Reports on international peasant conferences frequently appeared in the newspaper *LIGA*, drawing connections between Latin American, African, and Asian peasants and rural workers. These comparisons addressed issues of imperialism and colonialism and conditions of slavery and feudalism still afflicting peasants in these regions.¹²³ Francisco Julião and representatives of the Ligas Camponesas participated in pan-American peasant conferences as well, building relations with other Latin American countries. For instance, in March 1963, Julião and Ligas participants traveled by invitation from the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Chile (CUT, Chile’s National Labor Center) to Santiago, Chile, giving speeches and meeting with labor unions, including a party in the San Miguel (a working-class neighborhood of Santiago) organized by the Frente de Acción Popular (FRAP, Front for Popular Action), which later turned into one of the Allende strongholds and areas most repressed by the

¹²² “Devemos protestar energeticamente contra a atitude abusiva dos Estados Unidos de usar territorios livres como o nosso para suas macabres experiencias com armas de destruicao macica.” *Diario de Pernambuco*, 8 April 1959, 1; *Diario de Pernambuco* 9 April 1959, 1.

¹²³ “Êxito no encontro camponeses da Bulgária,” *LIGA* 16 January 1963, 3.

Chilean military.¹²⁴ On this trip, Julião met with Salvador Allende, the future Socialist president of Chile, representing the connections being made among Socialist Party leaders in Latin America during these years. Other peasant movements in Latin America sought support from the Ligas in their struggles; for instance, a number of published letters were sent between the Ligas and the Confederación Campesina del Perú, the Central dos Trabalhadores Agrícolas do Peru, and the Frente de Liberação Nacional do Peru. These letters discussed the collaboration between Latin American countries in the struggle for land, the struggle against imperialism, and discussed the release of imprisoned peasants in Peru in the “El Frontón” prison.¹²⁵ Many of Julião’s books on the Ligas Camponesas were published in Spanish in the 1960s.¹²⁶

The Ligas Camponesas and the Brazilian Communist Party actively sought connections to Cuba throughout this period. The newspaper *LIGA* ran articles on Cuba in almost every edition, commemorating the successes of the revolution, publishing speeches by Fidel Castro, and stories about how the US threatened Cuban sovereignty. Advertisements read: “Peasant: The Cuban Agrarian Reform gave the land to those who work it. For this, the large landowners across the continent conspire against Cuba. Your answer is to participate in the National Meeting and in

¹²⁴ “Julião desenvolveu intenso programa no Chile: prometeu regressar de volta de Havana,” *LIGA* 6 March 1963, 3.

¹²⁵ “Confederação camponêsa do Peru exige liberdade de seus líderes presos pelos ‘Gorilas’ militares,” *LIGA* 6 March 1963, 3; “Mensagens dos presos políticos peruanos e do padre Bolo Hidalgo,” *LIGA* 27 March 1963, 4.

¹²⁶ For example, *Campesinos a mi!!* (Buenos Aires: Cia. Argentina de Editores, 1963); *Brasil, antes y despues* (Mexico: Editorial Nuestro Tempo, 1968); *Qué son las Ligas Campesinas?* (Montevideo: Arca, 1963); *Escucha, campesino* (Montevideo: Ediciones Presente, 1962); *Cambão: la otra cara de Brasil* (Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1968); *Hasta el miercoles, Isabela!* (Mexico: Editorial Cultura, 1967); *Ligas Camponesas, outubro 1962-abril 1964* (Cuernavaca, Mexico: Centro Intercultural de Documentación, 1969).

the Congress in Support of the Cuban Revolution that will take place this year in Brazil.”¹²⁷ Participants in protests often carried placards with Fidel Castro’s image, and with slogans declaring “Ianques no! Cuba sim!” Many Ligas members and leaders also took trips to Cuba for training missions and conferences.¹²⁸ For example, in 1963, António José Dantas and Elizabete Teixeira (Paraíba Ligas leaders) spent one month in Cuba, invited by the Cuban Government.¹²⁹ Dantas’s impression was, “we want to inform you that in Cuba, illiteracy does not exist, there is no prostitution or crime. The people are happy and satisfied with their government, a regime that gives them freedom, work, school, justice and bread.”¹³⁰ The campaign for Solidarity with Cuba was strong in Pernambuco, supported by students, urban and rural workers and intellectuals.¹³¹ Francisco Julião, faced by numerous death threats, sent his four children to live in Cuba for their protection.

¹²⁷ “Camponês: A reforma agrária Cubana deu a terra ao que nela trabalha. Por isso os latifundiários do continente conspiram contra Cuba. Tua resposta é participar do Encontro Nacional e do Congresso de Apoio à Revolução Cubana que se realizarão este ano no Brasil.” *LIGA* 20 February 1963, 3.

¹²⁸ For example, Julião and the best-known Brazilian Communist, Luis Carlos Prestes, gave speeches in Cuba about the connection between Brazil and Cuba. “Íntegras das entrevistas concedidas em Havana,” *LIGA* 20 March 1963, 2. The editor of the *Jornal do Bancário* (PCB), Flávio Tiné, spent one month in Cuba in 1962, reporting back on the wonders of the Cuban Revolution. “Cuba: Regressa Gerente do Jornal do Bancário. O Confrade Flávio Tiné Fala Acerca de sua Visita à Perola das Antilhas,” *Jornal do Bancário* 15 February 1962, 6.

¹²⁹ “Líderes camponeses visitam Cuba,” *LIGA* 28 August 1963, 1.

¹³⁰ “queremos informar que em Cuba não existem analfabetos, não há prostituição, não há roubo. O povo está contente e satisfeito com o seu Governo e com o regime que lhes deu liberdade, trabalho, escola, justiça e pão,” “Líderes camponeses visitam Cuba e mostram-se impressionados com a Revolução,” *LIGA* 28 August 1963, 3.

¹³¹ In June 1960, Francisco Julião brought to the Assembleia Legislativa of Pernambuco a measure with 43 signatures (of 65 deputados) declaring support for the Cuban Revolution by the Pernambucan population. “Líder das Ligas Camponesas diz que a solução é desapropriar engenhos,” *Diário de Pernambuco* 12 June 1960, 13.

Three noteworthy visitors to Pernambuco – Célia Guevara and Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir – also showed the connections established between Cuba and Northeastern Brazil. The mother of Ché Guevara, Célia Guevara, traveled to Recife in May 1961 to give a speech, invited by the Sociedade Pernambucano de Defesa da Mulher e da Criança.¹³² Guevara claimed that her son was not a Communist; he was a man of the Left but not affiliated with any particular political party. Anibal Fernandes, editor of the *Diario de Pernambuco*, criticized the visit in light of the “communist massacres” in Laos and Hungary, as well as the political executions in Cuba.¹³³ Fernandes claimed that it was irresponsible and “un-Brazilian” to support the Revolutionary government of Cuba, because Recife was a liberal city in favor of democracy and against bloodshed. A bomb exploded at the location where Célia Guevara was speaking, injuring two people, and was declared a “true scene of terrorism” in Recife.¹³⁴

In 1960, Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir traveled from Cuba to Brazil and then returned to Cuba. They toured many regions of Brazil, oftentimes with author Jorge Amado as their guide, and participated in numerous conferences. Sartre lectured on colonialism and “anti-imperialist” revolutions, speaking about pressing political questions such as the Algerian Revolution, the Cuban Revolution,

¹³² “Mãe de ‘Che’ Guevara está no Recife e fez conferência,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 18 May 1961, 12.

¹³³ Anibal Fernandes, “Brasil, Sim; ‘Barbudos’, Não!” *Diario de Pernambuco*, 19 May 1961, 4.

¹³⁴ “Bomba explodiu na conferência da mãe de ‘Che’ Guevara: Duas vítimas no HPS,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 23 May 1961, 7.

and the Ligas Camponesas in Brazil.¹³⁵ In his final interview in Brazil, Sartre said that even though his trip was too short to speak with any authority about the problems in Brazil, two things were evident. First, that the working class in the industrialized South of Brazil was “reformist,” and second that the “*camponês nordestino* is revolutionary, in the sense that their ‘situation’ is revolutionary.”¹³⁶ According to Sartre, people in Northeastern Brazil faced the same problems as Cubans and Algerians. “Although unconscious, the rural *nordestino* will perceive that only land redistribution will allow for the continuation of his life, but that this redistribution must be done by the *camponeses* themselves.”¹³⁷

The other transnational connection that the Ligas Camponesas tried to establish was between the Ligas and the struggles for independence in Africa. In May of 1963, a column first appeared entitled “Voz da África,” which provided details on the struggles in Africa, such as in the Congo, Angola, and Algeria. One extensive article in *LIGA* published poems from the revolutionary poets of Angola, denouncing racism in the United States and declaring Angolan independence. The poems appeared with a cartoon depicting black Angolan soldiers marching with guns

¹³⁵Luís Antônio Contartori Romano, *A passagem de Sartre e Simone de Beauvoir pelo Brasil em 1960* (Campinas: Mercado de Letras; São Paulo: FAPESP, 2002): 190. Specifically, this is illustrated by the conferences held in early September in Araraquara.

¹³⁶ Romano, *A passagem de Sartre*, 246. Quoted from “Sartre volta à Revolução: ‘Cuba depende da dignidade dos países da América Latina’” in *Jornal do Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro, 22 October 1960. In an interesting coincidence, Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir depart from Brazil only ten days before the first, groundbreaking article by Tad Szulc was published in *The New York Times*. The coincidence illustrates how ideas and movements gained importance among a wide variety of groups throughout the world during this period.

¹³⁷ Romano, *A passagem de Sartre*, 246.

and a flag on top of a reclining giant white Portuguese soldier.¹³⁸ Francisco Julião also read Frantz Fanon's publications about the Algerian revolution, which influenced his perceptions of the struggles in Northeastern Brazil.

In addition to the speeches by Fidel Castro and Ché Guevara published in the *Ligas* newspaper and in the Communist Party newspapers, frequent speeches by Mao appeared in these papers. These speeches discussed the need for agrarian reform and peasant revolution and also the ideals of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Mao's writings, such as the "Proclamation of Emancipation" and his declaration to African-Americans appeared in the *Ligas* newspaper, published in full.¹³⁹ Julião also traveled to the Soviet Union and to China on a number of occasions, meeting with Mao and giving classes on Brazilian politics and culture in the Soviet Union.¹⁴⁰ The *Ligas* also published articles in a column entitled, "Revolutionary Consciousness," explaining Leninism. While this was enough to label the *Ligas Camponesas* as "communist" during the Cold War, in retrospect and in the context of Third World independence struggles, the *Ligas* seemed to be looking for ways and means to fight what they saw as US imperialism or neo-colonialism. The *Ligas* did not adopt a strict Leninist or Maoist line, but they looked far and wide for possible answers to building a movement with the strength and means to restructure the landholding system in Brazil. The *Ligas* concentrated on constructing a common dual enemy – the

¹³⁸ "Poetas Angolanos lutam pela independencia," *LIGA* 6 November 1963, 3.

¹³⁹ "A proclamação da emancipação dos Afro-Americanos de Mao," *LIGA* 21 September 1963 (no.49), 3;7.

¹⁴⁰ "Julião: A China dará, em breve, lições à União Soviética," *Diario de Pernambuco* 15 December 1960, 11.

latifundio and the U.S. – that allowed the Ligas to form connections with other Third World struggles in the early 1960s.

Cultural Representations of the Northeast as Third World

Sharing some of the same images and ideas as the Ligas Camponesas and the Communist Party, a group of filmmakers started the cultural movement known as Cinema Novo (CN) in the early 1960s that presupposed a pan-American or Third World revolutionary movement. The cinemanovistas helped to create the New Latin American Cinema Movement, participating in conferences and film festivals that tied together filmmakers in Cuba, Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Mexico. first wave cinemanovistas concentrated on two main themes: the urban slums and the rural Northeast. Glauber Rocha, one of the principal CN directors, wrote a manifestation, the Aesthetic of Hunger, in which he declared the need for a new “grammar” of Third World cinema, an aesthetic that incorporated the non-exotic poverty and hunger of the Third World. Similar to the Ligas Camponesas, the cinemanovistas also took a stance against what they considered U.S. imperialism or neo-colonialism, although their projects were based in the medium of cinema and a rejection of the Hollywood aesthetic.¹⁴¹ Rocha borrowed from Frantz Fanon’s call for Third World liberation in that he argued that the aesthetic of hunger and violence were supposed to create the

¹⁴¹ Ana M. López argues, “Always conceived of as a challenge to the hegemony of the Hollywood import and foreign control of cinematic institutions and as an active agent in the process of cultural decolonization, the New Latin American Cinema is not just a filmmaking movement; it is a social practice intimately related to other movements struggling for the sociocultural, political and economic autonomy of Latin America.” Ana M. López, “An ‘Other’ History: The New Latin American Cinema,” 311.

moment that the colonized becomes aware of the violence of colonization, and acts upon this realization, and forms a revolutionary movement. Rocha's early films - *Barravento* (1960) and *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* (1964) – connected the regional culture of the Northeast to the anti-colonial struggles of the Third World. He used regional themes of messianism, cangaço, rural poverty, and Afro-Brazilian religion with the objective of connecting the Northeast to the struggles in Algeria and Africa.¹⁴²

Three influential films focused on the rural Northeast are commonly cited as creating this aesthetic and the CN movement: Glauber Rocha's *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* (1964); Ruy Guerra's *Os Fuzis* (1964); and, Nelson Pereira dos Santos's *Vidas Secas* (1962).¹⁴³ All three films depict impoverished Nordestinos who react violently to their situation, unable to change the established structures and culture that contribute to their downward spiraling impoverishment and misery. *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* tells the story of a rural couple, who proceed through historical narratives of resistance – messianism and the cangaço – after Manuel reacts violently, killing the large landowner who exploits him. In *Os Fuzís*, the rural population is depicted as mute and passive, figures in a small town in the sertão statically existing like cattle while the main characters, soldiers and the truck driver Gaúcho, struggle over the issue of protecting the food storage from being sacked by the starving population. *Vidas Secas* depicts a family in the sertão who are powerless against their

¹⁴² About *Barravento*, Rocha said “Não me interesse o fato regional, logo pensei nas lutas da África e da Argélia.” In Marta Campos, *Colonialismo, cultura interno, o caso Nordeste* (Fortaleza, 1986), 83.

¹⁴³ Eduardo Coutinho's *Cabra marcado para morrer* (1984) would have been included in this trilogy, but the filming was interrupted by the 1964 coup and Coutinho only returned to the film in the early 1980s.

environment and the power structures of the rural Northeast, exploited and mistreated by the large landowners and the soldiers.

At the same time that these films were released, a non-CN movement film, based in Northeastern Brazil won at Cannes. Anselmo Duarte's *O pagador de promessas* (1962) employed well-known actors, many of whom were not Nordestino, and used more standard aesthetics to tell a politically conservative story of rebellion in Northeastern Brazil. Zê de Burro travels by foot for days carrying a large wooden cross on his back to fulfill a promise to Santa Barbara/Iansã to ensure the health of his burro. Once he reaches the Church of Santa Barbara, he is refused entrance because his promise was made to Iansã in a candomblé ceremony instead of at a Catholic Church. Suddenly, politicians and journalists turn Zê into a rebel, declaring that he is leading a revolutionary movement for agrarian reform while the only thing poor, ignorant Zê is interested in doing is entering the Church with his cross to fulfill his promise.

The commercially popular productions of Nordesterns, or Brazilian Westerns based on the stories of cangaceiros, also influenced the representations of Northeastern Brazil. These films adopted a narrative that was in part Northeastern – based on culture, traditions and stories of *o Nordeste* – but were also influenced by the narratives and styles of the Italian Spaghetti Westerns and Hollywood Westerns. Nordestern films reinforced traditional narratives of the Western, telling the story of how masculinity and violence connected to ideas of civilization in the modern nation. Heroes and villains struggled in the “wild west” of the sertão, an area depicted as feudal and lacking the influence of the modern state. Some films ended with the

triumph of the hero in the end, but more often than not, films ended in a bloody fight with the annihilation of the actors.

A fourth school of film production in Brazil connected to representations of Northeastern Brazil in the early 1960s was the Paraíba Documentary school. These documentaries never received the international recognition of the other film movements, but influenced the cinemanovistas in their use of non-professional actors and the aesthetics of creating a Third World cinema. The filmmakers were amateurs who produced films that were “imperfect,” with direct sound, hand-held shots, drastic lighting, and non-linear narratives and editing. After the screening of the first of these films, Linduarte Noronha’s *Aruanda*, cinemanovistas drew inspiration, seeing the imperfections of the documentaries as the symbol and aesthetic of what type of film could come from the impoverished Third World: raw, ugly productions that depicted local culture in a realistic, non-exotic or non-studio style.

Besides the Brazilian filmmakers, other filmmakers from Latin America, the United States and Italy went to Northeastern Brazil to make films and documentaries in the early 1960s. Some of these films were never completed. Roberto Rossellini, for example, was invited to Pernambuco to film Josué de Castro’s books on Northeastern Brazil, *O homem e os caranguejos* and *Documentário do Nordeste*. Rossellini visited Pernambuco but never completed the film. At the time of the military coup, Cuban filmmakers were on location at the Engenho Galiléia, but never finished the film on the struggle of the Ligas Camponesas. Fernando Birri, the Argentine director associated with the Santa Fé School, visited Pernambuco in April

1963, with the plan to direct a co-production in Pernambuco.¹⁴⁴ An ABC news team produced a film on Northeastern Brazil and the Ligas Camponesas in 1962, telling the story of a poor peasant who wandered barefoot in Recife, through the streets lined with the symbols of modernity such as television stores. Severino had supposedly been abandoned by the State, and sought alternatives to his impoverished situation by going to the headquarters of the Ligas Camponesas and meeting with Francisco Julião who promised to help the peasants. The documentary's most remarked upon scene was one of a large landowner showing off his American pistol, shooting it numerous times in front of the casa-grande. The film used Abelardo da Hora's murals of the Ligas, of Julião and of Fidel Castro, suggesting the connections between the unrest in Northeastern Brazil and the Cuban Revolution.

Although all of these films were drastically different, with an array of political and commercial objectives, they built upon an imagined idea of the region known as *o Nordeste*. The number of films produced during these years suggests how central Northeastern Brazil was to the Cold War struggles, culturally and politically. While the films established a connection between Northeastern Brazil and the Third World, they also "coded" Northeastern Brazil within the national imagination. This coding created a version of Northeastern Brazil as impoverished, trapped by its history, populated by backwards men and women who lacked all forms of agency, even the ability to communicate with one another. Oftentimes, the images were of certain areas of the sertão, the driest, harshest topography where the pointed caatinga and the relentless sun inhibited modern life. Fanatics, cangaceiros, and violent landlords

¹⁴⁴ "Fernando Birri: Virá da Argentina para rodar filme e ensinar cinema," *Diario de Pernambuco* 28 April 1963, (2nd cad), 8.

ruled the area, isolating it from anything that people living in Rio or São Paulo understood as Brazilian.

Coding in film creates an imagined place and people that may never exist but that becomes the way in which a region or a population is represented in films. Even when a director tries to subvert the meaning of the codes, the power of the entrenched representation often locks the associated meaning in place. Coding has been used to explain how representations created the Other(s) in the United States; for example, in representations of “hillbillies” of Appalachia, Native Americans, and African-Americans. As James Snead argued about blacks in Hollywood film, “stereotypes and codes insulate themselves from historical change, or actual counterexamples in the real world. Caricatures breed more caricatures, or metamorphose into other, but still remain in place.”¹⁴⁵ Similarly, Horace Newcomb has looked at the stereotypes and constructions of the fictitious place known as Appalachia that television programs such as *The Dukes of Hazard* and *The Beverly Hillbillies* created.¹⁴⁶ The cultural production of Northeastern Brazil and Nordestinos is similar to the Other(s) created in U.S. popular culture, which suggests how common it is to create the Other in cinema because the medium requires a certain level of stereotyping to produce a story that is coherent to the public.

¹⁴⁵ James A. Snead, “Spectatorship and Capture in King Kong,” in *Representing Blackness: Issues in Film and Video*, ed., Valerie Smith (London: The Athlone Press, 1997), 27.

¹⁴⁶ Horace Newcomb, “Appalachia on Television: Region as Symbol in American Popular Culture,” *Appalachian Images in Folk and Popular Culture*, ed., W.K. McNeil (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 315-329.

Northeastern Brazil and the Nation

*Those who live in Rio have the impression that the Northeast is something like Afghanistan.*¹⁴⁷

Benedict Anderson's widely accepted definition of the nation as an "imagined community" provides the platform for asking questions about inclusion and exclusion, and why and how national communities are imagined and how these ideas change. Among other issues, scholars have looked at national definitions in terms of race/ethnicity, gender and sexuality, regionalism, and struggles over defining the nation. By and large, the widely accepted belief about the place of Northeastern Brazil within the nation is that it is the backwards, non-modern Other and it is the location of the heart of the "authentic" Brazil. The other chapters of my dissertation explore more specifically the contested constructions of Northeastern Brazil within the nation by focusing on specific symbols and the struggles used by regional actors to change or reaffirm their meanings. In this section, I briefly lay out some of the commonly held assumptions about *o Nordeste* and its place within the nation.

As the above quotation suggests, for those who live in Rio, the Northeast was a place like Afghanistan.¹⁴⁸ The major newspapers in Rio and São Paulo published articles on the Northeast and the Ligas Camponesas, including extensive special

¹⁴⁷ "Para quem vive no Rio, tem-se a impressão de uma coisa assim como o Afeganistão." Anibal Fernandes, "A vida numa zona sertanejo do Nordeste," *Diario de Pernambuco* 7 March 1959, 4.

¹⁴⁸ It is impossible to fully grasp what is meant by the comparison between the Northeast and Afghanistan, but what is important is the portrayal of the region as exotic and foreign for Brazilians living in the urban center-south.

publications in *O Estado de São Paulo* and multiple reports later published as a book (*Os Industriais da Seca e os “Galileus” de Pernambuco: Aspectos da luta pela reforma agrária no Brasil*, 1960) in the *Correio da Manhã* (Rio) by Antonio Callado. I will briefly describe the coverage of the Northeast in these two papers in the early 1960s, to show how it is consistent in many ways with the coverage in the U.S. mainstream press. Similar types of descriptions of the Northeast, of Nordestinos, and of regional problems could be found in the press coverage in the south, illustrating the process of Othering within the nation that occurred during this period. The major difference was in the transnationalization of the Ligas and their struggles. In the Brazilian papers, few references were made to Fidel Castro and Cuba, China, the Soviet Union. The communist threat was seen as tied to the Brazilian Communist Party or the Brazilian Socialist Party, not foreign communists. Also, the narrative of *Os sertões* plays out much more in the Brazilian perception of the region: The fanatic leader Julião has been organizing the ignorant peasants and the solution is in national programs for development and repression of the communist threat.

A special edition of *O Estado de São Paulo* in May 1963 reported on the Northeast, the Ligas Camponesas and SUDENE. Articles in this special edition relied on social indicators and statistics to define the Northeastern population and its problems, emphasizing the inadequate caloric intake, infant mortality rate, malnutrition, illiteracy, low per capita income, among others. Survival of a Nordesteño was described as “a miracle.” The photographs printed in the special edition were remarkable in the ways that they depicted the Nordesteño and the Ligas Camponesas for the Paulista public. Many of them showed scenes of rural male

workers, dressed in white clothes with straw hats that fit the definition of a peasant mass in scenes that were replicated in most of the Cinema Novo films from this period. One photograph depicted a “barracão do engenho” or the plantation store with a well-fed man calmly standing behind a counter, framed by the food and goods for sale. On the other side of the counter are the peasant masses, leaning over the counter, pointing at the food in what can be described as desperation. The caption explains the situation, stating, “the worker often suffers the atrocious martyrdom of the father who returns to his hungry children with empty hands.”¹⁴⁹

The report labeled the Ligas as Communist, stating that Francisco Julião masked his affiliation with the Communist Party by saying he was “Marxist-Leninist.” It blamed the infiltration of communists in Northeastern Brazil on the poverty level that was perpetuated by the plantation system and the greed of the latifundiários. This reflects the debates going on in 1963 in Brazil about who should benefit from the U.S. sugar quota after the Cuban quota had been cut to zero: Paulista planters or Northeastern planters. Photographs of old engenhos carried the caption that explained, “the barely evolved mentality of the engenho owner and the proselytism of Leftist groups are the main components driving the unrest disseminating throughout the Northeast.”¹⁵⁰ Another photograph depicts a group of male rural workers involved in a discussion, labeled as Ligas Camponesas

¹⁴⁹ “o trabalhador sofre muitas vezes o martírio atroz do pai que volta de mãos vazias para os filhos esfomeados.” Rubens Rodrigues dos Santos, “A SUDENE e a revolução nordestina,” special edition of *O Estado de São Paulo* 28 April to 7 May 1963, 4.

¹⁵⁰ “a mentalidade pouco evoluída do dono de engenho e o proselitismo de elementos de esquerda são os componentes principais da inquietude que se alastra pelo Nordeste.” Rubens Rodrigues dos Santos, “A SUDENE e a revolução nordestina,” special edition of *O Estado de São Paulo* 28 April to 7 May 1963, 3.

participants. The caption is particularly dehumanizing or Nordestino-izing, stating: “Workers without any education, semi-politicized by Leftist groups, express their opinions about the problems of the cane-growing region in the Northeast, deciding what attitude to adopt in issues involving the engenho owners.”¹⁵¹

The solution according to the article is SUDENE and the Alliance for Progress. But the article argues that these two programs for development may be moving in the wrong direction and the focus should be on raising the standard of living of the Nordeste by creating better employment conditions in the rural areas instead of focusing on infrastructure and major development projects such as irrigation. The feudal, traditional society needed to be brought into the modern capitalist world, replacing the oligarchies with liberal leadership. The economic policies the region required were listed as fighting inflation and creating a free-trade economy in the Northeast. Politically, the communists needed to be repressed, Miguel Arraes and his leftist coalition needed to be kept in line, politics needed to have a social focus, and the only way to avoid a revolution was if the Republicans in the US did not succeed in destroying Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress. Finally, the article emphasized the need to build a non-Left middle class in the Northeast, to focus on the misery of the proletariat, and the Brazilian Armed Forces, many of whom

¹⁵¹ “Trabalhadores sem instrução alguma, semi-politizados por elementos de esquerda, emitem opinião sobre problemas da zona canavieira do Nordeste, decidindo qual a atitude a adotar em questões com os donos de engenho.” Rubens Rodrigues dos Santos, “A SUDENE e a revolução nordestina,” special edition of *O Estado de São Paulo* 28 April to 7 May 1963, 7.

came from the Northeast, needed to place more attention on this region and to become better organized to control the social unrest.¹⁵²

Antonio Callado, journalist, novelist and playwright, published a series of articles in the main newspaper of the era in Rio, the *Correio da Manhã*. Callado visited the Engenho Galiléia on numerous occasions, and participated in the celebrations for the expropriation of the Engenho in February 1960. His reports painted a more positive picture of the Ligas Camponesas and were influential in their criticism of the federal government program for drought relief, commonly known as the “drought industry” because it was known to be used by the landowning elite to secure their power rather than to help the poor rural workers who suffered the worst consequences of droughts. Callado’s criticism helped support the development agency SUDENE and also explained why social movements such as the Ligas Camponesas were necessary in the region. Similar to *O Estado de São Paulo*, Callado’s reports strongly criticized the landowning elite and the type of “feudal” structures that were seen to exist in Northeastern Brazil. Change was necessary for Northeastern Brazil.

Even though Callado’s reports saw the Ligas Camponesas as a viable solution, or at least a necessary manifestation of the neglected and feudal society, the focus was strongly on the work of Francisco Julião and his role in organizing the Ligas Camponesas. This produced a similar effect of stripping the agency from the rural workers as leaders and instigators of social struggle. Callado published a novel shortly after the coup that described how he understood the Ligas Camponesas and

¹⁵² Rubens Rodrigues dos Santos, “A SUDENE e a revolução nordestina,” special edition of *O Estado de São Paulo* 28 April to 7 May 1963, 10-11.

the other rural struggles. *Quarup* told of a priest who became conscientizado to the problems of the rural workers and helped organize a rural social movement to fight for the right to land. After the military coup in the novel, the priest and the rural members of the social movement were arrested and brutally tortured. The priest ends up disillusioned with the struggle and fails to make any real change in the Northeast, or follow through with the revolution that he had initiated. While it is a fictional account, Callado's descriptions of the struggle show how he understood the Ligas Camponesas: a regional struggle led by one leader who swayed the masses of rural workers to support his political projects that failed in the end, falling prey to military repression.

Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Júnior has argued that the idea of *o Nordeste* is heavily connected to the state of Pernambuco. Pernambuco has the largest population of any state in the Northeast and Recife is arguably the most important capital city. In part, the importance of Pernambuco in the Northeast has been based on the power of the elite to create a Pernambucano-centered *Nordeste*. In 1924, the "Centro Regionalista" was formed in Recife with the goal of uniting Northeastern leaders and creating a regional space to discuss its needs and hopes.¹⁵³ But, the rural elite and intellectuals did not limit Pernambuco's importance only to the Northeast. As Gilberto Freyre argued in 1959, "What exists is a superiority of Pernambuco in the cultural life of Brazil as a whole that comes from a large concentration of cultural values (in the sociological sense of culture) in existence since the sixteenth century in

¹⁵³ Gilberto Freyre, "Pernambuco e o Nordeste" *Diario de Pernambuco* 28 January 1959, 4.

its people and at its core, also known as being a noble and distinct regional civilization. It is impossible to diminish or to deny this superiority.”¹⁵⁴

Intellectuals and political leaders in Northeastern Brazil made connections with the nation through what can be seen as “internal colonialism” or proto-dependency theory. José Joffily, state deputy, claimed in 1959 that Brazil could not be a developed country with the Northeast still underdeveloped.¹⁵⁵ The editor of the *Diario de Pernambuco* commented in early 1960 on the issue of separatism in Brazil, stating that the only way to solve the problems in Brazil would be to institute a more equal distribution of things since the shocking disparity in Brazil creates “a lack of understanding, resentment and hate.”¹⁵⁶ While some argued against idea of internal colonialism, based on the premise that Paulistas would not want an impoverished Northeast because they needed to enlarge the Brazilian market for their industrial goods, the counter-argument also existed: the Paulistas became wealthier because of their exploitation of the Northeast.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ “O que existe é uma superioridade de Pernambuco na vida cultural do país – e não apenas da região – que vem de uma maior concentração desde o século XVI de valores de cultura – cultura no sentido sociológico – entre sua gente, núcleo, aliás de toda uma nobre e nítida civilização regional. Impossível apagar-se ou repudiar-se essa superioridade.” Gilberto Freyre, “Pernambuco e o Nordeste” *Diario de Pernambuco* 28 January 1959, 4.

¹⁵⁵ “Não há Brasil desenvolvido com o Nordeste sub-desenvolvido,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 3 February 1959, 1.

¹⁵⁶ Anibal Fernandes, “O separatismo e a miséria,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 27 January 1960, 4.

¹⁵⁷ Anibal Fernandes, “A lógica nas coisas,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 21 September 1960, 4; Anibal Fernandes, “Revalidação Nordestina,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 28 September 1960, 4. Fernandes made a solid economic argument in this editorial but his argument also reflect the counter-argument being made about the exploitation of the Northeast by the industrialized Southeast.

In contrast to the developmentalist arguments, the rural elite and traditional intellectuals emphasized the importance of retaining the traditional culture of the Northeast. They claimed that the introduction of modern industry or agricultural practices would destroy the culture of Northeastern Brazil. For instance, modern fishing techniques would destroy the culture of the *jangada* and the *jangadeiro*.¹⁵⁸ Following similar logic, the Ligas were referred to as “foreign” agitators and communists who threatened the lifestyle of the traditional Northeast. The legitimacy of the rural movements were attacked by the rural elite because they were seen to be the product of outside influences who little to do with traditional Northeastern culture and society.

Northeastern Brazil was not only defined in the 1950s and 1960s as feudal and traditional but also as patriarchal and as a masculine space. As Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Júnior has argued, the *casa-grande* and the *senhor do engenho* have been described in regionalist literature as the established patriarchal figures of the state, culture, and society for centuries in Northeastern Brazil.¹⁵⁹ One example of a change to this system was the election of Cid Sampaio as governor of Pernambuco in 1958, who was not a part of the landowning elite. Also, the continued attacks from all sides on the *latifundio* as a feudal system that hindered the modernity and progress shook the patriarchal authority. But, this threat was not accepted without a challenge. Numerous articles and editorials described the value of the traditional culture of the

¹⁵⁸ Gilberto Freyre, “Um tema para Jorge Amado,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 15 February 1959, 4.

¹⁵⁹ Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Júnior, “Limites do mando, limites do mundo: a relação entre identidades espaciais no nordeste do começo do século,” *História, questões e debates: Revista aó Paranaense de História* 13: 34 (2001): 89-103.

Northeast, oftentimes referring to folk culture and the role of the latifundio in preserving order. A number of folhetos, or literatura de cordel, described the changes in women's clothing and the fact that women rode bicycles as negative forces of modernity seeping into and threatening the traditional society.

Military Dictatorship and Northeastern Brazil

Antes de tudo, o sertanejo é um forte.

- Severino Cavalcanti, ex-Pernambucan Federal Deputy of the Partido Progressista who rose to political power during the military regime. Upon his resignation as the President of House for issues of corruption (*mensalão* scandal) in September 2006, Cavalcanti quoted from Euclides da Cunha's *Os Sertões* to make a claim about the injustices Nordestinos face in Brazilian politics.

The Instituto Joaquim Nabuco de Pesquisas Sociais (IJNPS, Joaquim Nabuco Institute of Social Research) was founded in 1949 through an initiative of then Federal Deputy Gilberto Freyre. According to an article in the *Diario de Pernambuco* in January 1949, the Institute was to focus on research into the social problems of the Northeast to help Recife return to its "former splendor as the center of social and intellectual renovation of Brazil."¹⁶⁰ The IJNPS funded a wide variety of research projects and conferences throughout the 1950s and 60s, on topics such as agricultural practices in Northeastern Brazil, drought, religion in small towns, and cultural studies on cangaceiros and literatura de cordel, often framed around ideas

¹⁶⁰ <http://www.fundaj.gov.br/50/histo.html>

from Euclides da Cunha's *Os Sertões*.¹⁶¹ The IJNPS also funded documentary projects, such as Linduarte Noronha's *Aruanda*, and it also attracted foreign scholars from its inception.¹⁶² Many of the key scholars of the IJNPS such as Estêvão Pinto, Gonçalves Fernandes, and Gilberto Freyre contributed to the *Diario de Pernambuco* on a regular basis. The studies tended to merge social science studies and statistics with long-held assumptions about the Northeast as the center of Brazilian traditions. The IJNPS had a connection to the Brazilian military from the start, sponsoring a number of conferences for the armed forces and the Escola Superior da Guerra (ESP) in the late 1950s and early 1960s to instruct military leaders on the problems and issues facing the Northeast.

One example of these training programs was a conference held at the IJNPS on May 13 to 18, 1963 entitled, *Transformação Regional e Ciência Ecológica*, that had the goal of understanding problems of the people from agrarian regions in the Northeast and the North of Brazil from an objective and scientific perspective.¹⁶³ This conference drew together debates over agrarian reform, including panels with participants from the Ligas Camponesas, the Catholic Church, researchers from the IJNPS, and regional politicians who led the colonization programs. One of the key figures at this conference was Humberto de Alencar Castello Branco, the first military

¹⁶¹ For instance, in 1955, Gilberto Freyre led a research course entitled, "Homen, cultura, e região" that looked at different aspects of the resistance to using modern agricultural practices in the Northeast. "Homen, cultura, e região," *Diario de Pernambuco*, 6 March 1955, 19.

¹⁶² Some of the universities that developed relations with the IJNPS included Colombia University, the Sorbonne, Heidelberg, Gant, and others.

¹⁶³ Gilberto Freyre, Estevão Pinto, Renato Campos, Francisco Julião, Pe. Antonio Melo, *Cana e Reforma Agrária*, (Recife: Instituto Joaquim Nabuco de Pesquisas Sociais, 1970), 59.

officer to take power after the 1964 coup, and the general in charge of the VI Army Division in Recife from July 1962 to July 1963 (General Costa e Silva also was one of the leaders of the VI Exército). During these years, Castello Branco and Gilberto Freyre established a personal friendship, and had many discussions on Nordeste culture.¹⁶⁴ Through this conference, it is possible to see the development of some of the assumptions about the Northeast that military regime later transformed into policies, largely based on a combination of ideas associated with modernization theory and developmentalism, and the positivist view of the Northeast and Nordestinos espoused by Euclides da Cunha. The conference proceedings were published in 1970 by the IJNPS as *Cana e Reforma Agrária*, with a forward that discussed the triumph of the movement of 1964 and emphasized the military participation in the conference, even publishing pictures of Castello Branco at the conference.

In the preface to the second edition of the publication, the editor drew heavily on the history of agriculture in Northeastern Brazil, describing the first systems of plantation agriculture installed in the region. Much of the information came from works by Gilberto Freyre such as *Casa-Grande e Senzala*, and detailed his writings on colonial race relations based on stereotypes of the Portuguese, Africans and Indians. But the main idea of the conference was to show that enough historical and socio-anthropological work had been done on Northeastern Brazil. What was needed were technical studies; for instance, studies about varieties of sugar cane and cane

¹⁶⁴ John W.F. Dulles, *Castello Branco: The Making of a Brazilian President* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 1978), 263.

diseases.¹⁶⁵ The conclusion of the conference was that many different ideas existed about agrarian reform and that agrarian reform had become a national issue, but that it was not enough to simply give the land to the peasants because this failed to consider the “biological impositions.”¹⁶⁶ Gilberto Freyre’s concluding comments referred to the uprisings of Canudos, Pedra Bonita and the Quebra-Quilos as precedents for understanding what was happening in the rural areas in the early 1960s. Freyre claimed that what was needed was a “revolutionary social politics to develop Brazil into a modern civilization in the tropics.”¹⁶⁷

The first panel included Francisco Julião, Luís Vieira of the Universidade Rural and the Associação Nordestina de Crédito e Assistência Rural, Francisco Targino de Siquiera of the Instituto Nacional de Imigração e Colonização, worker Manuel Gonçalo of the Federação dos Sindicatos Rurais, and Paulo Frederico Maciel and Mário Lacerda Melo of the IJNPS. The topic of the panel was the problem of land ownership in a capitalist system and explored the difference between radical agrarian reform and the creation of cooperatives. Julião defined radical agrarian reform as the abolishment of the latifundio system, replaced by small landholdings. Colonization was proposed as an alternative to radical agrarian reform, focused on the idea of changing the system of monocultural agricultural production into a more diversified system. But, as the panelist claimed, the alternative of moving Nordeste rural workers to other areas of Brazil, such as the Amazon, was controversial since Nordestinos supposedly were tied to their land and the culture of

¹⁶⁵ Gilberto Freyre, *Cana e Reforma Agrária*, 65.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 82.

¹⁶⁷ “política revolucionariamente social para o desenvolvimento do Brasil em moderna civilização no trópico,” Ibid., 87.

the Northeast. Julião made the argument that it was unjust to force a man to move from his home because of his impoverished situation; that if a rich man could decide where he wanted to live, the poor man should also have that option.¹⁶⁸ The other idea proposed was the modernization of agriculture and the cane industry, which was seen as a way to raise the salaries of rural workers by allowing Pernambucan sugar planters to obtain a greater percentage of the US sugar quota (in light of the fact that the Cuban sugar quota had been eliminated). The struggle for agrarian reform was identified as a Northeastern problem that needed specific attention due to the cultural and economic structures of the Northeast, but the panelists also argued that it was a national issue and a Latin American issue.

The second panel included Padre Antonio Melo of Cabo and the Church Federations of Rural Workers, Luís Gonzaga Xavier of the Associação dos Fornecedores de Cana, Beno Dantas of the Instituto Agronomico do Nordeste, João Alfredo of the Ligas Camponesas, Reinaldo Câmara of the Associação da Imprensa de Pernambuco and Renato Carneiro Campos of the IJNPS. The main points debated in this panel were about the sugar quota and its connection to the rural worker, the unionization of rural workers, and the creation of agricultural cooperatives. Padre Antônio Melo advocated an increase in the price of sugar and argued that the Northeastern sugar producers should be granted a greater percentage of the sugar quota. Melo talked about the level of protest in the rural areas that he described as something that people were losing sleep over. Protest as a means to resolve problems, he argued, was a “Brazilian tradition” that change only came by exerting

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 122-123.

pressure from below. Melo's solution was the modernization of agricultural practices, such as irrigation, in the Northeast, the establishment of cooperatives, and the increase of the price of sugar to raise the salary of the rural worker.

Most of the panelists agreed with Padre Melo. For instance, Luís Gonzaga, of the Fornecedores de Cana, stated that the Fornecedores wanted to find a way to calm the situation in the Northeast to facilitate the ability to work. He agreed with rural unionization and agreed with the Estatuto de Trabalhador Rural, which he described as a legal way to work out the problems in the Northeast. He stated that he was against the level of misery in the Northeast and asked for resources to develop and modernize the agricultural structure in the Northeast. The other panelists agreed that the problem was in the low wages paid to the workers, seen as a consequence of the "primitive" agricultural system. Student João Alfredo of the Ligas Camponesas countered this perspective by describing the views of another major Church leader, this one not at the conference, Padre Paulo Crespo. According to João Alfredo, in line with Pope John XXIII, Crespo argued against the existence of the latifundio. The latifundio system itself was "sinful" and he described it as what led to the misery of the rural worker. Alfredo argued that the latifundio was guilty of creating the problems in the countryside since the peasant did not own or manage the usinas; the peasants were only victims of the system and reacted out of their misery.

The third panel focused on how to turn what was seen as a feudal system into a capitalist system. The head of the third panel was the economist Caio de Amorim Pontual, with the discussants Ernesto Gonçalves Pereira Lima of the Sociedade Auxiliadora da Agricultura do Nordeste, José Geraldo Cosa of the Associação Cristã

Academica, and Mário Lacerda de Melo and Alcides Nicéias of the IJNPS. The main point debated was how to change the system from what was seen as three actors – the consumer, the worker and the businessman – to a system of two actors where the business and the worker became incorporated into one unit. The major problem, according to the panelists, was in the low productivity of agriculture in the Northeast. The situation in the Northeast was compared to the North/South division in Italy, and the solution proposed was the modernization of the agricultural industry.

The fourth panel consisted of the usineiro Gustavo Colaço Dias, Waldemar Borges Rodrigues Filho of the Superintendencia da Reforma Agrária, Gilberto Osório de Oliveira Andrade of the Associação de Geógrafos Brasileiros, Luís de Melo Amorim of the Escola Superior de Veterinária da Universidade Rural de Pernambuco, Paulo Rangel Moreira of the Poder Legislativo of Pernambuco, and Paulo Frederico Maciel and Cláudio Souto of the IJNPS. The main topic of debate was the legality and constitutional reforms needed to implement agrarian reform and rural workers' rights. The panelists emphasized the need to regulate and enforce a minimum wage for rural workers and an eight-hour workday. They also suggested the need for hygienic housing for rural workers, and reforms made to the educational system for adult and rural instruction. This correlated to ideas of modernization of the Northeast and of the agricultural system. Again, most of the panelists agreed that the price of sugar needed to be increased for these reforms to take place, to bring the standard of living and the standard of agricultural production in the Northeast to the same level as in the South and rural São Paulo.

The final panel was headed by Antônio Carlos Cintra do Amaral, the Secretário-Assistente do Governo de Pernambuco, and panelists included José Hesketh Lavareda of the Universidade de João Pessoa, Fernando de Oliveira Mota of the Universidade de Recife, Marco Antônio Maciel of the União dos Estudantes de Pernambuco and Antônio Carolino Gonçalves of the IJNPS. This panel focused on the issue of popular organization and challenged the government's idea of "order," looking at strikes in the cane region to make the point that struggle is necessary in underdeveloped countries for change to happen. Amaral argued that the strikes were a necessary part of a functioning democracy, where the new society struggled against the old for workers' rights and greater equality. The concluding remarks of the conference, by Governor Miguel Arraes, discussed the inequality and "contrasts" of the cane region, described as one of the richest and most fertile areas in the Northeast, but where the majority of the people live in vast misery.¹⁶⁹ Arraes argued that the biggest obstacle the Northeast faced was in the implementation of agrarian reform and the expropriation of sugar plantations because of the planning such reforms required and because of current constitutional limits to expropriation. He also stated that modernization of the agricultural system had been underway since 1945, with the purchase of new equipment such as tractors, but the problem was larger in that would take more than machines to modernize an agricultural system. He claimed that the tractors existed but the Northeast did not have the financial resources or technical know-how to keep the machines functioning. Arraes argued that the basic reforms

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 307.

needed for modernization to occur in the Northeast involved a transformation of the landholding system and a raise in the standard of living for all Nordestinos.

What Arraes argued for was an extremely difficult step to take, one that required money, Constitutional reforms, and a wide-ranging transformation of Northeastern society. This was not the path selected by the leaders of the military regime. Castello Branco's policies toward Northeastern Brazil and the issues of agrarian reform, though, reflected some of the main issues debated at this conference. According to John W.F. Dulles, Castello Branco sought a "gradual, flexible solution that would show respect for property ownership, avoid *minifundio* and combat unproductive *latifundio*."¹⁷⁰ The plan pushed forward was a constitutional amendment that allowed for expropriations with full compensation and for a land statute that emphasized colonization. The Land Statute was passed in November of 1964, under the direction of the Alliance for Progress clause, cited earlier in the chapter that urged land reform. The Castello Branco government asked IBRA (Instituto Brasileiro de Reforma Agrária) to conduct a census and to map out the inequitable land holdings, and established INDA (Instituto Nacional de Desenvolvimento Agrário) to combat rural poverty.¹⁷¹ James Rowe conducted research on this census in 1966 in the interior of Bahia, observing how rural landowners traveled for days to get to the municipalities to register their landholdings, part of a project known as the "Semana

¹⁷⁰ Dulles, *President Castello Branco*, 92.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

da Terra,” that had the objective of registering unproductive latifundios and minifundios to devise a system of reform.¹⁷²

Castello Branco’s experience as the Commander of the VI Army in Recife led him to believe that the problems of rural activism in Northeastern Brazil had been sensationalized in the press and would not lead to a Cuban-style revolution in Brazil. Castello Branco was not particularly concerned about the Communist threat in the Northeast. According to Dulles, Castello Branco arrived at this assumption after reading a travel account by Alceu Amoroso Lima, *Visão do Nordeste*. Lima argued that Nordestinos were trapped by their “historical-social circumstances” that made them prone to individualism and deviant religious beliefs. This made them unlikely to fall prey to Communist or fascist movements because these movements supposed depended on creating a homogeneous mass out of the population.¹⁷³ Castello Branco had supposedly underlined the passages in the book that made such claims, supporting his perspective that the Northeast was an area of minor concern for Brazilian national politics or for the battles of the Cold War.

One of the main stances on Northeastern Brazil maintained throughout the military regime was that development was needed in the form of agro-industry. In a 1967 report, Juan de Onis, Latin American correspondent for *The New York Times*, published a positive review of the changes the military regime had brought to the Northeast, describing the Northeast as the “fastest-developing region” in Brazil.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² James W. Rowe, “Revolution or Counter-Revolution in Brazil,” *East Coast South America Series* Vol. XII, no. 1 (February 1966).

¹⁷³ Dulles, *Castello Branco*, 273.

¹⁷⁴ Juan de Onis, “Developing Latin America: Brazil’s Northeast Turn Toward Growth,” *Currents* (March 1967), 62.

According de Onis, this was due to private investment, an improved political climate and a tax law that encouraged Brazilian and foreign corporations to invest in the Northeast.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, he claimed that agrarian reform was not the only answer to the problems of unemployment and poverty. Luis Vieira claimed that “the issue of artisan craftwork and the professional training of the “rural man” is perhaps ‘more important than the actual issue of agrarian reform.’”¹⁷⁶ The development of Northeastern Brazil as the folkloric center of Brazil, a place where artisanal work replaced agricultural work, was one of the significant changes in national policy and cultural meaning given to Northeastern Brazil. A key example of how this functioned was with the cultural movement known as the Movimento Armorial, a cultural movement which emerged in the 1970s in Pernambuco, led by novelist and playwright Ariano Suassuna. The Armorial artists studied forms of popular culture in Northeastern Brazil, such as “classic” literatura de cordel, and borrowed from it what they considered to be this “national essence,” and then transformed the popular into the erudite.¹⁷⁷ In contrast to the Cinema Novo directors and the cultural movements of the 1960s, the Armorial artists and writers sought a “mythical” and romanticized rural past--the historical, nostalgic roots of a Brazil that never existed but had been

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 63-64.

¹⁷⁶ “o problema do artesanato e da orientação profissional do ‘homem do campo’ é talvez, ‘mais importante que a própria reforma agrária.’” Gilberto Freyre, *Cana e Reforma Agrária*, 89-90.

¹⁷⁷ Candace Slater argues that “the artists who consider themselves part of the Movimento Armorial all look to the cordel and/or anonymous romances for inspiration.” Candace Slater, “Folk Tradition and the Artist: The Northeast Brazilian Movimento Armorial,” *Luso-Brazilian Review* 16, no. 2 (Winter 1979):164.

described before by novelists, scholars, and artists earlier in the twentieth-century.¹⁷⁸ They called themselves “anti-modernists,” and strove to “recover” Brazil’s Iberian, African, and Indigenous pasts as well as Brazil’s Catholic tradition.¹⁷⁹ This served as a counterpoint to the increasingly radical Catholic Church and politics of the Archbishop of Recife and Olinda, Dom Helder Câmara, who fought against the repression of the military regime from its onset.

Although Ariano Suassuna was allegedly not a “supporter” of the military regime, he accepted positions in state institutions and ministries throughout the dictatorship. He was a founding member of the *Conselho Federal de Cultura* in 1967 and in 1975 he was appointed Secretary of Education and Culture in Recife. In addition, he served as the Director of the *Departamento de Extensão Cultural* (DEC) at the Federal University of Pernambuco from 1969 to 1974.¹⁸⁰ Suassuna’s objectives during this period were to create a *comunidade nacional* based on the notion of a homogeneous Brazilian population and expressed through this population’s popular culture. The state had the duty, according to Suassuna, to “formulate cultural objectives on the basis of interpretation of national aspirations, and to maintain levels

¹⁷⁸ For more about the construction of a romanticized and mythological Nordeste past, see Albuquerque Júnior, *A invenção do Nordeste*.

¹⁷⁹ According to Maria-Odilia Leal McBride, Suassuna’s most defining aspects are that he is a sertanejo and that he converted to Catholicism in his mid-20s. Maria-Odilia Leal McBride, *Narrativas e narradores em A Pedra do Reino: estruturas e perspectivas cambiantes* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 6-7.

¹⁸⁰ Mark Dinneen’s primary focus is on the Movimento Armorial in *Listening to the People’s Voice: Erudite and Popular Literature in North East Brazil* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1996).

of quality of cultural production and protect it from excessive innovation, which might threaten its specifically national characteristics.”¹⁸¹

While Suassuna’s and the Armorial Movement may have appeared to counter the military government’s emphasis on modernization and progress, I believe that in the case of Northeastern Brazil, the idea of “recovering” the traditional roots of national culture actually supported the military regime’s position toward this region. Suassuna’s leadership role in the state government throughout the military period, and the fact that the majority of founding artists in the Armorial Movement held appointments at the Departamento de Extensão Cultural supports the argument that ideas promoted by the Armorial Movement were also ideas supported by the military government.¹⁸² The focus on the traditional culture and society, including religion, provided a stance to fight against the major legitimate voice against the dictatorship in Northeastern Brazil: the Catholic Church.

From these examples, it is possible to see the changes in national politics and perspectives on Northeastern Brazil during the military regime. After the coup, the military arrested, tortured, and forced into exile all of the important leaders of the Left and of the rural social movements with the exception of priests (although some priests were tortured and arrested in Northeastern Brazil during the military regime). Through repression, the military regime quickly deposed of any “revolutionary” threat posed by Northeastern Brazil. Agrarian reform and programs to eradicate the extreme inequalities were institutionalized at the national level, but for the most part,

¹⁸¹ Política Nacional de Cultura, Ministério de Educação e Cultura, 1975, cited in Dinneen, *Listening to the People’s Voice*, 182-183.

¹⁸² See the chart of employers in Slater, “Folk Tradition and the Artist,” 175.

the projects and studies seemed to have little effect on restructuring landholdings or raising the standard of living in the Northeast. The military placed a new emphasis on modernization of agriculture and agro-industry, as studied by Anthony Pereira. At the same time, the cultural emphasis was rooted in the ideas of Northeastern Brazil as the folkloric heart of Brazil, a place to find the quaint and traditional artwork and culture. Overall, this chapter has shown how ideas about regional identity influenced social movements, cultural production, and political policies throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The classification of the Northeast as the backwards and non-modern Other drew together multiple social actors in a battle over development projects, the access to land, and the legitimacy for the right to define the problems and solutions for the region and its people. And this also came from a new appropriation of history, as described in an editorial in the *Diario de Pernambuco* in May 1964:

E os verdadeiros democratas deveriam tomar a si ir levando a todos os recantos do país o clima de devassidão janguista, do humanismo, no nacionalismo de operetta da mistificação desenfreada e rendosa, mercê da qual a quase totalidade dos chamados líderes “populistas” reeditaram no Brasil o exemplo de Verres, de que dizia Cícero entrara pobre numa Sicília rica e saíra rico de uma Sicília empobrecida e degradada.

Foi isso que também aconteceu entre nós e o povo precisa conhecer a história, a vida, as façanhas do seus “salvadores” cínicos e insinceros, para quem a Nação não passo de uma “estância” rendosa, no roubo, nas bambochalias, nas orgías do mar de lama que foram a tônica fundamental do governo passado.”¹⁸³

¹⁸³ “Revolução incompreendida,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 13 May 1964, 4.

Chapter 3: “Evolution or Revolution”: The Battle Against Underdevelopment

“O mundo não anda para trás. Nem caranguejo anda para trás.”¹⁸⁴

Gondim da Fonseca, 1963

By the mid-1950s, the ideologies, assumptions, and symbols of modernization influenced everyday life and popular thought throughout Brazil. As exemplified by Gondim da Fonseca’s statement, the narrative of progress and moving forward toward a modern society was widespread: Even the crab (or Nordestino) does not walk backwards. The icon of the new modern nation materialized in the construction of Brasília and Juscelino Kubitschek’s famous statement proclaiming “fifty years of progress in five” encapsulated the intensified drive for industrialization. Developmentalist projects, missions, dreams and policies proliferated during the 1950s and 1960s throughout Brazil, and the place of the Northeast in this wave of development is essential to understanding the contradictions, the limitations, the challenges, and the legacies of positivism attached to the project of modernizing Brazil. As the “traditional” heart of Brazil and a region defined as “backward” and feudal, the Northeast seemed to be a precarious project to incorporate the region into the new modern nation. This chapter analyzes the numerous debates and proposals for development and modernity in Northeastern Brazil.

¹⁸⁴ Gondim da Fonseca, *Os Gorilas, o povo e a reforma agrária*, (Sao Paulo: Editora Fulgor, 1963), 23.

A number of scholars have examined the type of development that modernization brought to Northeastern Brazil and to Nordestinos, mostly focusing on the type of modernization projects introduced by the military regime.¹⁸⁵ These scholars argue that modernization occurred in the Northeast along with economic growth: the Northeast had the highest level of GNP growth in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.¹⁸⁶ But, the modernization did not lead to a more equitable distribution of wealth or land. As Araújo states, the distribution of land worsened throughout the 1970s with a higher concentration of large estates in the hands of an increasingly smaller number of landowners.¹⁸⁷ While agricultural production increased steadily through this period, in certain sectors such as cane, cacao and cotton production, the increase in production did not lead to an improvement in agricultural techniques or in the standard of living for rural workers.¹⁸⁸ While it is easy to conclude from these statistics that modernization does not lead to a greater distribution of wealth, the question remains of how and why this was the trajectory that modernization projects followed in Northeastern Brazil. Not only is it too simplistic to argue that this was the way that the traditional elite managed to retain and expand their power in the Northeast, but this type of statement also too readily conforms to the entrenched

¹⁸⁵ See Pereira, *The End of the Peasantry*; Maybury-Lewis, *The Politics of the Possible*; and, Tânia Bacelar de Araújo, "Northeast, Northeast: What Northeast?" *Latin American Perspectives* 31, no.2 (March 2004): 16-41.

¹⁸⁶ From 1965 to 1968 the Northeast GNP grew at 10 percent; from 1965 to 1985 the regional GNP grew at an average of 6.3 percent per year. Araújo, "Northeast, Northeast," 18.

¹⁸⁷ In 1970, small holdings (less than 100 hectares) accounted for 30 percent of the landholdings in the Northeast and by 1985 this percentage had decreased to 28 percent. In the same period, large land holdings (over 1000 hectares) increased from 27 percent in 1970 to 32 percent in 1985. *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

narrative of regional identity: despite working class and peasant movements for radical transformation of Northeastern society, the state and the regional elite repress the movements and remain in control of the resources and power, exploiting rural workers and increasing the level of poverty for the majority of the population. Even though this occurred, it was not a natural result of what was proposed in the 1950s and early 1960s. By analyzing projects for modernization and how modernization was seen as a part of Northeastern Brazilian identity, it is possible to see how such projects and movements significantly challenged certain aspects of the regional narrative and also where such proposals fell short of suggesting a radically different Northeast.

While discourses of modernity and developmentalism – or “evolution” – were popular throughout the Cold War period in Brazil, they were not hegemonically accepted as the solution for the “backwards” and impoverished Northeast. In the early 1960s, the discourse of revolution generated strong claims as a different type of course for the future of the Brazilian nation. Starting in 1959, the mainstream newspaper, *The Diário de Pernambuco*, started publishing editorials, raising the question of “evolution or revolution,” a theme often taken up throughout the 1960s. Groups such as the Ligas Camponesas, the União de Estudantes de Pernambuco, and the Brazilian Communist Party urged “revolution” in Northeastern Brazil. While the call for revolution was in many ways connected to the Cuban Revolution, leaders of these social movements and leftist groups also relied on regional symbols of historic revolutions in Pernambuco to define what they meant by “revolution.” And, similar to the competing views of “evolution” or modernization, vigorous debates took place

about the meaning of revolution for Northeastern Brazil. This is to say, the idea of revolution in Northeastern Brazil, with few exceptions, did not take on the connotation of an all-out war or even guerrilla warfare. In general, the idea of revolution was a call to resist and push for radical agrarian reform, to support Northeastern Socialist leaders and projects, and to resist foreign imperialism, exploitation by the developed regions of southern Brazil, and the latifundio.

Debates of evolution versus revolution all drew upon the idea that the poverty of Northeastern Brazil had to change, either by revolution or modernization. Poverty, by in large, was measured by social indicators and representations of misery, illiteracy and disease. For instance, one article in *LIGA* claimed that 800,000 babies died annually in Brazil related to hunger and malnutrition. The article points out that this is the same number of people who lived in Recife, the third largest city in Brazil.¹⁸⁹ The author describes the infant mortality statistics in many different towns and areas of the Northeast, claiming that in the state of Pará, in the towns of Altamira and Vizeu, some years all of the children died. After revealing the statistics of infant mortality in the “developed” world, the author claims that this is a “white war” (Guerra Branca), that “kills slowly and has no defensive barricades”, and is a consequence of class struggle.

“O Brasil perde braços que acionariam a sua indústria e o seu desenvolvimento e amanharia os seus campos onde escasseia a produção. Perde cerebros que ministrariam aulas às crianças que sobram da Guerra analfabetas. Perde futuros técnicos profissionais liberais, missionários, apóstolos. Perde soldados para a defesa da Pátria. Mas ninguém percebe a devastação. Não interessa aquelle dirigente tomar conhecimento dela. Os filhos da classe dominante nascem fortes,

¹⁸⁹ Osmar de Melo, “Mortalidade infante no Brasil é calamidade pior que a Guerra,” *LIGA* 24 April 1963, 6.

nutridos sadios, são bem alimentados. Criam-se fortes e sadios. Não são tragados pela morte prematura. Só morrem os filhos da gente humilde, ou melhor, estes já nascem com os pés na sepultura.

Todos nós nos espantamos quando ouvimos dizer que os desvários nazistas de Hitler exterminaram em sete anos de guerra de 1939 a 1945 cerca de 4 milhões de russos. Mas nos esquecemos de que em cada sete anos morrem no Brasil cerca de 4 milhões e 800 mil crianças que não conseguem atingir o primeiro ano de idade. (...) Crime maior não pode haver do que a mortalidade infantil é um verdadeiro genocídio. É o extermínio frio de vidas inocentes. Mas ninguém responsabiliza ninguém. Ninguém pune ninguém por isso, nem pelo crime de gastar a União com a manutenção de cavalos do Exército mais recursos financeiros do que com a assistência à maternidade e à infância. Vivemos num regime que dá mais valor a cavalos do que a criaturas humanas. Vivemos num sistema de Governo, onde as classes privilegiadas lutam encarnicadamente pela manutenção de seus privilégios seculares que são a causa remota e atual da mortalidade infantil. Vivemos num regime onde o direito à vida ainda é um privilégio de minorias, onde o maior direito que têm as classes humildes é o de morrer de fome resignadamente, sem direito a qualquer protesto pelo menos pois é logo taxado de agitação comunista.¹⁹⁰

This article illustrates the meaning of poverty for the Ligas Camponesas in the 1960s.

The article blames the latifundio, first and foremost, for the dire situation facing

Brazil. And, as Padre Alípio of the Ligas Camponesas, declared in public on 27

March 1963, “As panelas vazias dos lares dos trabalhadores são hoje os tambores da revolução.”¹⁹¹

Those who believed in modernization as the solution to poverty used very similar depictions, if not the exact same statistics and stories. However, the poverty of the Northeastern Brazil, in mainstream newspapers and in the U.S. media, was not referred to as a “war” and usually poverty is more closely related to the threat of

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹⁹¹ “Padre Alípio no Rio Grande: As panelas vazias dos lares são tambores da revolução,” *LIGA* 27 March 1963, 2.

communism being able to prey upon such impoverished areas. Whereas the solution for the Ligas Camponesas was radical agrarian reform, according to the U.S. media and policymakers, the solution to poverty and misery was modernization.¹⁹² Representations of misery and poverty appeared in every article on Northeastern Brazil following Tad Szulc's front-page article on the Ligas Camponesas in late October of 1960. The article began: "The makings of a revolutionary situation are increasingly apparent across the vastness of the poverty-stricken and drought-plagued Brazilian Northeast. In the area, 20,000,000 live on average annual incomes of less than \$100. Racked by chronic malnutrition and rampaging disease, they seldom live much beyond the age of thirty."¹⁹³ More statistics defining poverty follow:

There are sections of the arid Northeast where the annual income is about \$50. About 75 percent of the population is illiterate. The average daily intake is 1,644 calories. Life expectancy is 28 years for men and 32 for women. Half the population dies before the age of 30.

The birth rate is 2.5 per cent, annually. Gastric disease takes an enormous toll in babies less than 1 year old. In two villages in the state of Piauí, taken at random, not a single baby lived beyond one year. Those who stay alive are attacked by a belly-swelling disease, schistosomiasis, transmitted by water snails in the polluted rivers. Hookworm and tuberculosis also take a tremendous toll.¹⁹⁴

Similar descriptions based on statistical notions of poverty reappear in the majority of the reports in the US media on Northeastern Brazil.

Josué de Castro, a international and local politician who also published studies on the poverty and misery of Northeastern Brazil during these years, played a key

¹⁹² Sarah Sarzynski, " 'Cheaper than a Coke at a Swanky Hamburger Joint' and 'Other' Discourses of *Nordestinos* During the Cold War, unpublished paper.

¹⁹³ Tad Szulc, "Northeast Brazil Poverty Breeds Threat of a Revolt," *The New York Times* 31 October 1960, 1.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1, 4.

role for both “evolution” and “revolution” groups.¹⁹⁵ His studies depicted the degree of poverty and inequality in the region, but also constructed a narrative of this poverty; for instance, in his story of the crab people, or infant deaths. Likewise, the poet, João Cabral de Melo Neto, turned the poverty and inequalities of the Northeast into verses, eventually turned into songs (i.e., Chico Buarque’s “Funeral de um lavrador”) and films (“Morte e Vida Severino”). And, politicians and social movement leaders used these popular representations of poverty to make claims for the need for “evolution” or “revolution.”

This chapter describes what were seen as the solutions to this poverty by a number of different groups and individuals in the early 1960s in Northeastern Brazil. I show how the main social movements and intellectuals connected their solutions to representations and historic symbols of “evolution” and “revolution” as a way to connect their projects to Northeastern regional identity. Drawing from recent studies on the interpretations of such Cold War battles, this chapter tries to contextualize the debates within Northeastern Brazil. Michael Mahoney’s work on how ideas of modernization and revolution were adapted and reshaped in the Mozambique context provides an interesting comparison.¹⁹⁶ Mahoney shows how the “New State” and

¹⁹⁵ Publications include: *Documentário do Nordeste* (Rio: José Olympio, 1937); *Geografia da fome* (Rio: O Cruzeiro, 1946); *Geopolítica da fome* (Rio: Editora Casa do estudante do Brasil, 1951); *O livro negro da fome* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1960); *Sete palmas de terra e um caixão* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1965); *Homens e caranguejos* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1967). Most of these books were published in English, Spanish and other languages.

¹⁹⁶ Michael Mahoney, “Estado Novo, Homem Novo (New State, New Man): Colonial and Anti-Colonial Development Ideologies in Mozambique, 1930-1977,” *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development and the Global Cold War*, eds. David C. Engerman, Nils Gilman, Mark H. Haefele, Michael Latham (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003): 165-197.

FRELIMO, a Marxist revolutionary group, both incorporated ideas of modernization and revolution into their political discourse, also changing the ideas of modernity and revolution to a Mozambique or African context. This process is similar to the type of adaptations and overlaps that occurred in Northeastern Brazil.

A strict division between those promoting revolution and those promoting modernization is an artificial line since the ideas of revolution and modernization seeped into most of the political and cultural projects in Northeastern Brazil in the 1960s. That is to say, the debate of evolution versus revolution depended on the dialectic, and the terms themselves, “revolution” and “modernization” held multiple meanings. Some of the cases could appear in either category, and many of those calling for revolution, also used the discourse and even shared “modernization” objectives and vice-versa. In this chapter, I first examine the meanings of modernization and some of the political projects associated with modernization such as industrialization and agrarian reform. Second, to show the ways in which modernization constructed or was constructed by regional identity, I illustrate how the symbol of Delmiro Gouveia was projected as a symbol of Northeastern modernity. In other words, to challenge the notion of Northeastern Brazil as the antithesis of modernity, intellectuals and journalists dug into the past to unearth an autochthonous symbol of modernity. The story of Coronel Delmiro Gouveia and the factory town of Pedra, Alagoas, demonstrated that modernity was not only possible in the “backwards” sertão, but that modernity in Brazil had emanated from Delmiro Gouveia and the town of Pedra.

And, third, I show how cultural representations in theater and film created the idea that the “traditional” Northeastern society was a “land of contrasts,” a place of contradictions that presented a threat to modernization projects and a hope for revolutionary projects. Both “evolution” and “revolution” were idealized projects in which filmmakers and playwrights created versions of the meaning of poverty and the possibility for change. These cultural productions presented the “Nordestino” as a symbol of the antithesis of modernity or revolution: backwards, impoverished, feudal, passive, uneducated and “unconscious.” But, at the same time, the cultural productions portrayed possibilities for change for the Nordeste, through evolution or revolution, emphasizing a narrative that such changes were precarious at best. What is ironic about these films and plays is this focus on the questionable future for the Northeast. At a time in which developmentalist projects proliferated and revolutionary social movements actively demanded change, the cultural representations of the Northeast did not present a shining optimism for change. Instead, they resorted to slight variation on the dominant narrative of the region – an area in which change is impossible, a traditional region chained to feudalism – by presenting an open-ended question as the future for the Northeast. For example, in Glauber Rocha’s *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* (1964), the film ends with Manoel and Rosa running toward the sea, but Rocha provides no clear image of what the future holds for them, where they are going, and if they will ever leave the “Northeast.” The uncertainty of a different future is the theme of most cultural productions about the Northeast in the early 1960s.

Evolution: Modernity and Northeastern Brazil

As history has shown us, change has been a gradual, evolutionary process rather than revolutionary. In this evolution, the little things form the composite whole – the economy expands as the farmer obtains a few additional bushels of beans from his planted acreage, the laborer earns enough additional cruzeiros to buy that Sunday suit or that plot of ground, or the businessman makes and saves enough of his additional profits to modernize his store and offer additional advantages to the customer, the industrialist enlarges his factory, offers new products, and hires new employees, and the Government – through a “normal” taxation is able to afford to build the modern highways and public facilities that in turn redound to the advantage of the farmer, the laborer, the businessman, and the industrialist.¹⁹⁷

The above quote exemplifies a “traditional” version of modernization theory within the ideals of creating a model capitalist society. But, while this was the project presented by a US trade mission to Northeastern Brazil in 1960, it was not the only version of what modernization meant in the Northeast. To start this chapter, it is thus necessary to define what was meant by modernity and modernization and put these discourses into the context of the 1950s in Brazil and in Northeastern Brazil.¹⁹⁸ The recent historiography on modernization theory and the influence of social science in U.S. policy defines these terms in the context of the United States. After briefly laying out these definitions, I show how these ideas were translated in the context of

¹⁹⁷ Brazil, Recife Consulate. General Records, 1936-1963. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State. 19 May 1960, Address to the “Associação Comercial de Pernambuco” to announce that the Trade Mission will be in Recife June 14 – 20. RG 84, Box 86, Folder 510.2 Trade Mission to Brazil June 1960, p.2.

¹⁹⁸ Many scholars have examined how modernization in the Northeast supported “traditional” systems of sugar production and political organization such as Peter Eisenberg, *The Sugar Industry in Pernambuco, 1840-1910: Modernization without Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974). While it is necessary to understand the contradictions of modernization, or how the development of rural agriculture can indeed further strengthen “traditional” forms of governance and socio-economic divisions, my work departs from this by examining the meanings and expectations attached to “modern” in the 1950s and 1960s.

Northeastern Brazil. W.W. Rostow's claim that modernization would "catch like a virus" is not entirely inaccurate; in fact, symbols of modernity such as tractors, radios, and schools were desires many Nordestinos shared in the 1950s and 1960s. But U.S. modernization theorists fell short with the assumption that the modernization "virus" was automatically accompanied by a desire for or even an acceptance of the American "way of life." In the case of Northeastern Brazil, it is clear that modernity and modernization acquired different meanings, influenced by regional identity, the Catholic Church, and anti-American/anti-imperialist politics.

The recent historiography on modernization theory has focused on how modernization theory became an integral part of U.S. domestic and foreign policy in the 1950s and 1960s. Michael Latham argues that modernization was connected to Cold War politics and the U.S. government's perception of the need to contain communism and revolutions in the "Third World."¹⁹⁹ While scholars have distinguished different strains or theories of modernization among the key proponents, Latham argues that certain core assumptions can be found in all of these theories. As he explains:

(1) "traditional" and "modern" societies are separated by a sharp dichotomy; (2) economic, political and social changes are integrated and interdependent; (3) development tends to proceed toward the modern state along a common, linear path; and (4) the progress of developing societies can be dramatically accelerated through contact with developed ones.²⁰⁰

Modernization theorists often saw Latin American countries as being in a transitional state in the 1950s, as traditional societies on their way to becoming modern societies.

¹⁹⁹ Latham, *Modernization as Ideology*.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 4.

According to some theorists, this was the most “dangerous” stage for a society in that the transition would face staunch opposition from certain groups and would also make it more susceptible to the threat of Communism.

While Latham and Nils Gilman both argue that modernization theorists saw the United States as the ideal, most highly developed, and most modern society, Gilman argues that this version of modernity was still more ideal than real, even in the United States.²⁰¹ Another contradiction or problem that scholars address has to do with distinguishing modernization, modernity, and modernism. Gilman elides the terms, arguing that modernization theorists used such terms without drawing a distinction, simply using modern or any derivative as a way to celebrate Enlightenment ideas of progress, technology and science.²⁰² For instance, as sociologist Edward Shils described at a conference in 1959:

In the new states “modern” means democratic and equalitarian, scientific, economically advanced and sovereign. “Modern” states are “welfare states,” proclaiming the welfare of all the people and especially the lower classes as their primary concern. (...) [Modernity] involves land reform. It involves steeply progressive income taxation. It involves universal suffrage. Modernity involves universal public education. Modernity is scientific. It believes the progress of the country rests on rational technology, and ultimately on scientific knowledge. No country could be modern without being economically advanced or progressive. To be advanced economically means to have an economy based on modern technology, to be industrialized and to have a high standard of living.”²⁰³

²⁰¹ Ibid.; Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future*, 4.

²⁰² According to Gilman, the modernization theorists, “repeatedly described their political heroes as ‘modernizers, successful nations as ‘modern’ ones, the culmination of development as ‘modernity,’ and the advocates of this process (including themselves) as ‘modernists.’” Usually definitions of modernism and modernization draw distinctions, defining Modernism as a cultural movement, that is a “reaction against rather than a manifestation of modernization.” Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future*, 7.

²⁰³ Ibid., 1-2.

Both Latham and Gilman focus on the manifestations of modernization theory and theorists in U.S. foreign policy and projects for development. Latham examines Kennedy's projects of the Alliance for Progress and the Peace Corps as "modernization" projects, and Gilman investigates think tanks and research departments in the U.S. where modernization theory was developed and turned into policy.

In this chapter, I further explore the argument that "modern" acquired multiple meanings and that all of the terms (modern, modernization, modernity, modernism) came to signify certain ideas of technological or industrial development. But, I hesitate to see modernization theory as being something exclusively linked to the United States. As Gilman argues, "Modernism was a polysemous code word for all that was good and desirable."²⁰⁴ In the context of Northeastern Brazil, the idea of "modern" also rested on the assumption that modern was good and desirable, but the idea took on many different meanings, as this chapter illustrates. Some intellectuals and journalists equated modern society with the United States and Western Europe, while others defined modern society as a hybridization, in which the ideal civilized and modern society also incorporated characteristics of Northeastern patriarchy and "traditional" culture. In fact, many scholars saw Europe and the United States as a threat to a modern Northeast.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 7.

²⁰⁵ The criticism of the U.S. and U.S. projects for modernity must also be read within the context of the Anti-American sentiments that were common throughout Northeastern Brazil at this time. Similar to the ways in which the Ligas Camponesas and the Communist Party questioned U.S. democracy by raising the issue of U.S. race relations and segregation, modernity was also challenged based on inequalities seen

Projects for a Modern Northeast: Land and Agriculture

In 1959, the Catholic newspaper of Caruaru, Pernambuco published an article describing what its editors saw as the “problems of the Northeast.” Wandragézilo Neves argued:

Em plena era atomica, o brasileiro trata da terra como se vivesse ainda na idade media. Queremos atingir fogetes, com metodos agricolas do tempo do Imperio...O que o nordeste precisa, antes de tudo, é de uma agricultura mechanizada modern, de uma especie de reforma agraria em fim porque so assim esta vasta regioa poderá se reabilitar da decadencia progressiva da qual vem sendo vitima nos ultimos tempos.²⁰⁶

The Catholic Church was only one of the many groups that argued for a type of modernization of the agricultural system in Northeastern Brazil. Many groups depicted the rural areas as “feudal,” comparing rural areas in the region with modern systems of agricultural production or the symbols of modernity themselves, such as the “atomic age.” By and large, most groups argued that change in the rural sector was necessary for the Northeast to modernize, but the solutions proposed varied. Some argued for radical agrarian reform, others for colonization programs, others for rural education. In this section, I briefly describe some of the proposals for the rural Northeast in the 1950s and early 1960s. What is apparent is that before the pressure

with in the model U.S. modern society. For example, one article in the *Ligas* newspaper emphasized the fact that inequalities continued to exist in the “modern” United States, especially in the workforce where women and non-whites received lower wages than white men for the same work. (“A desigualdade subsiste,” *LIGA* 15 October 1963, 2).

²⁰⁶ Wandragézilo Neves, “Problemas do Nordeste,” *A Defesa: Jornal de Orientação Catolica* (Caruaru) 14 March 1959 no.945. National Library. Rio de Janeiro.

of radical agrarian reform proposed by the Ligas became identified as a serious communist threat, projects for agrarian reform had support from numerous groups that opposed the Ligas. Later in the chapter, I discuss the changes to these proposals that were introduced in 1964.

In 1959, the mainstream newspaper, *O Diário de Pernambuco*, published a number of articles about the need for agrarian reform. These articles coincided with the court cases over the expropriation of the Engenho Galiléia, and most of the editorials seemed to support some type of agrarian reform as necessary to the creation of a modern Northeast. Aníbal Fernandes, the editor of the *Diario*, saw the expropriation of Galiléia as a triumph in that it was a move toward creating a more equitable landholding system to replace the “feudal” system of latifundios and coroneis. He argued for a system of agrarian reform, not Communist, but perhaps similar to the Mexican system.²⁰⁷ In another article, Brazil was compared to Italy with the idea that Italians had incorporated the rural south into the Italian nation, and thus Brazil needed to “modify the national hymn” to include the rural population and support agrarian reform.²⁰⁸ The Sociedade Auxiliadora da Agricultura de Pernambuco,²⁰⁹ an umbrella group associated with the sugar plantation owners and the fornecedoros de cana that promoted the modernization of agriculture, published an

²⁰⁷ Aníbal Fernandes, “Pequenas propriedades, pequenas culturas,” *Diario de Pernambuco*, 1 December 1959, 4.

²⁰⁸ “Meneghetti acredita na reforma agraria,” *Diario de Pernambuco*. 17 January 1959, 1.

²⁰⁹ The Sociedade Auxiliadora da Agricultura de Pernambuco has its roots in the nineteenth century, and may have been connected to other national groups of planters and merchants established in the nineteenth century to promote the modernization of agriculture, commerce and industry such as the Sociedade Auxiliadora da Indústria Nacional (SAIN). Eul-Soo Pang, “Modernization and Slavocracy in Nineteenth-Century Brazil,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* IX: 4 (Spring 1979): 671.

article in the *Revista do Nordeste* giving their support to agrarian reform. According to the president of the Sociedade, Zilde Maranhão: “We’re not against the organization of rural workers in associations of class. Well, if we were, we would be denying all the democratic privileges. We understand that the rural worker should organize to defend their legitimate interests.”²¹⁰ According to the article, the Sociedade approved of expropriation of large estates as long as the landowner received a just price.²¹¹ Even if the Sociedade favored the rights of large landowners and cane growers, after the legal case of Galiléia, they were forced to acknowledge the perhaps inevitability of agrarian reform and rural unionization. It became increasingly impossible to justify the latifundio system in an era of modernization; land reform was seen as a necessary component of modernization and development.²¹²

But, land reform was not the only remedy for the “feudal” Northeast. In fact, many argued that if education and technical support did not accompany land reform, then such projects would be a failure. One of the proposed alternatives to land reform was the creation of land cooperatives, or “colonização.” At a talk at Recife’s Rotary Club in January 1959, Dr. Jair Meireles described the “progress and modernization” that could be introduced to Northeastern agriculture by Japanese immigrants. According to Meireles, the rural Northeastern worker was “mal habituado a um

²¹⁰ “Ligas Camponesas: O grande Hiato social,” *Revista do Nordeste*, Ano II, no. 21, (December, 1959): 27

²¹¹ The Sociedade also stated their opposition to land seizure, communist and foreign infiltration, and radical agrarian reform. If expropriation was done legally and through the court system, then the Sociedade would support the judgement.

²¹² The need for land reform was even raised in the Alliance for Progress as a way to create more equitable and democratic societies in Latin America.

trabalho metodizado e sobretudo, na sua grande ignorancia insiste nos metodos africanos de cultivar a terra e manter processos de combate as pragas baseados nos meios supersticiosos de rezas, benzeduras, etc..”²¹³ The Japanese were seen as the “best immigrants to save the Northeast” because, according to Meireles, São Paulo’s agricultural sector had achieved modernization through their Japanese immigrants. “A colonização japonesa em Pernambuco terá função basica a condição de escola de trabalho, revolucionando os metodos de produção agricola e implantando uma nova mentalidade no meio rural capaz de apresentar a agricultura como uma profissão digna de ser imitada e nao reduzindo o homem a ser da gleba cada vez mais pobre sem capacidade aquisitíval para um mínimo de conforto.”

The colonization project was supported by ANCAR (Associação Nordestina de Credito e Assistencia Rural), the Instituto Nacional de Imigração e Colonização (INIC) and the Secretary of Agriculture and funded by the Banco do Nordeste. From 1955 to 1959, Japanese immigrants were brought to the Northeast to modernize the Northeastern system of agriculture, based on the premise that Japanese immigrants had modernized agriculture in São Paulo, Paraná and Rio de Janeiro.²¹⁴ Another

²¹³ Jair Meireles, “Plano de Colonização Japonesa em PE,” *Boletim Semanal do Rotary Club do Recife*. Ano XXVI, no. 28, Recife, (22 Jan 1959): 156-59.

²¹⁴ *Diario de Pernambuco*, 1 February 1959, 4.

In the published comments from a 1966 symposium celebrating the 60-year anniversary of Japanese immigration in São Paulo, the role that Japanese immigrants played in developing São Paulo was a central issue. Many of the attendants commented on the types of agricultural products introduced by the Japanese immigrants. The notion that Japanese immigrants placed a higher value on community organizing and education for children also was noted as how the Japanese had helped to develop São Paulo. Oracy Nogueira, “O imigrante japonês e o desenvolvimento de São Paulo,” and commentaries by Antônio Jordão Netto and José Pastore, in *O japonês em São Paulo e no Brasil*, (São Paulo: Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiros, 1971): 194-199.

reason for the state interest in the Japanese immigrants to Pernambuco had to with possibilities for the Japanese government and private industry to invest in Northeastern development projects.²¹⁵ Projects included a cooperative established in Gameleira, Pernambuco in 1955, in which forty Japanese families were brought in to a community of sixty Nordestino families.²¹⁶ In 1958, the Catholic newspaper *A Defesa* described the colonization project in Bonito, Pernambuco to stimulate agricultural production and to instruct Nordestino rural workers in modern skills and techniques.²¹⁷ In 1959, six Japanese families went to Garanhuns, Pernambuco and thirty Japanese families went to a fazenda in Caruaru, among other places in the Northeast.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ As reported in a conversation about the Japanese Ambassador's visit to Recife, 13-16 April 1956: "The Governor's Secretary, Geraldo Guedes, informed me that the Japanese Ambassador spoke at length of the possibility of Japanese investments of capital and equipment, first in agricultural enterprises and then in industry, in this state. The state authorities appear favorably disposed toward having Japanese immigrants here, believing that by their industriousness and better techniques they will set a good example for local small agriculturalists and thereby stimulate agricultural production here. Guedes also said that the Japanese Ambassador is justifying to his govt the establishment of a Japanese Consulate at Recife. At the present time, informal estimates of state officials place the Japanese population in Pernambuco at somewhat less than 5,000, nearly all of them agricultural laborers." (p.1-2) Brazil, Recife Consulate, Classified General Records, 1938-1963. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State. Letter To Donald Edgar, Esquire, Supervisory consul General, Consular Section, American Embassy From Percy de F. Warner, American Consul. Official Use Only. 17 April 1956. RG 84, Rio, Folder 120.2 Letters to the Supervisory Consul General. National Archives.

²¹⁶ "Será instalada em Gameleira uma colonia agricola para o abastecimento da zona da mata e do Recife," *Diario de Pernambuco* 24 March 1955.

²¹⁷ Carlos Doria, "Os Niponicos virão..." *A Defesa: Jornal de Orientação Catolica* (Caruaru) 10/5/1958 no. 900. National Library. Rio de Janeiro.

²¹⁸ "Nucleo de Imigração Japonesas será instalada na fazenda Caruaru," *Diario de Pernambuco* 4 April 1959, 10; "36 Japonesas para colonização no interior," *Diario de Pernambuco* 20 June 1959, 8; "O japonês: Na batalha do Abastecimento Regional" *Revista do Nordeste*, no. 17 (Agosto 1959), 33.

What is remarkable about the colonization project is the degree to which race was considered a vital factor in the modernization of agriculture in Northeastern Brazil. Socio-economic factors such as the role that government subsidies had played in the development of agriculture in São Paulo and other states in the south of Brazil were not mentioned. Instead, the “modernity” of the Japanese immigrants had shaped agricultural development in the south, and thus, Japanese immigrants to rural areas in the Northeast could also modernize the inherently backwards and inferior Northeastern rural workers, who were often depicted as “African” or as using “African agricultural techniques.”²¹⁹ One commentator described the difference between the European and Japanese immigrants and their influence on Brazilian development. According to Antônio Jordão Netto, the Europeans had not resulted in a Europeanization of the “cabolclo”; “o que existiu foi a ‘cabolclização’ do europeu.”²²⁰ But, the Japanese immigrants had not faced this same “threat,” introducing new techniques and forms of community organization and education to

The other colonization programs supported by an initiative of the Governo Estadual e Federal do Brasil for “zonas subdesenvolvidas” included: Pio XII, Ceará, 5 families; Piun, Rio Grande do Norte, 10 families; Pnau, Rio Grande do Norte, 3 families; Rio Bonito, Pernambuco, 13 families; Cabo, Pernambuco, 7 families; Kubitschek, Bahia, 71 families; Ituberá, Bahia, 8 families; Una, Bahia, 35 families. A number of colonies also were set up in the states of Pará, Amazonas, Maranhão, Acre, Rondonia, Amapá, Roraima, Mato Grosso, and the southern state of Santa Catarina. Consulado Geral do Japão, *Emigração Japonesa no Brasil*, (São Paulo: August 1973), 4-5.

²¹⁹ According to a report by the Japanese Embassy produced in 1973, Japanese immigration to Brazil changed in 1961 when the Brazilian government requested “immigration of técnicos” for industrial development. The colonization projects of the late 1950s were at the tail end of what the Japanese Embassy classified as “post-war immigration” in which immigrants went to work in the agrarian sector. Consulado Geral do Japão, *Emigração Japonesa no Brasil*, (São Paulo: August 1973), 3.

²²⁰ Antônio Jordão Netto, Comentário, in *O japonês em São Paulo e no Brasil*, (São Paulo: Centro de Estudos Nipo-Brasileiros, 1971): 197.

the countryside. My point is not to debate whether or not Japanese immigrants led to an elevated degree of development in Brazil, but to emphasize the language used to argue how and why Japanese immigrants could be a solution to underdevelopment in the Northeast. According to these projects, the Nordeste did not need to be replaced or annihilated; instead his racial and cultural inferiority could be erased through education, training and modernization introduced by (racially superior) foreign, and specifically, Japanese “know-how.” While this line of argument differs from nineteenth-century Positivism in that the scholars and policy makers saw a possibility for change and development (instead of denegration), it is still predicated on notions of cultural and racial hierarchies.

Industrialization

In 1956, a representative of the Escola Superior da Guerra visited the Instituto Joaquim Nabuco de Pesquisas Sociais (IJNPS) and asked the researchers to prepare a lecture on the problem of “extremismo” in the Northeast. In mid-July 1956, researchers presented their conclusions to the 4a Exército, discussing what they saw as the problems and solutions to poverty and backwardness in the Northeast. According to the researchers at the IJNPS, the Northeast needed “cultural change.” The premise was based on the idea that if the United States was able to bring industry

to Africa with success, then industry could also function in Northeastern Brazil.²²¹ According to Paulo Frederico Maciel, the biggest hindrance to the development of industry was the Northeastern conception of time. So, the solution was creating a new notion of “industrial time” to make the “homem do interior” understand time as factory time instead of time being a “convenient pleasure”. According to Maciel, the nostalgic music, the use of hammocks, the pleasure in violent sports, and even the more “frenetic” rhythm of popular music had to be reformed to accustom Nordestinos to the discipline of factory work.²²² Folklore made the rural Nordesteño resistant to “evolution,” but all this could be changed by radio, which could introduce the Nordesteño to urban culture and make the *sertanejo* psychologically capable of socio-economic change.²²³ The discussion made no reference to the sizeable Nordesteño labor force already employed in factories in the urban south.

Debates and discussions about plans for industrial development in the Northeast focused on the question of the feasibility of industrial development. Immediate concerns about the expansion of rural social movements in the rural Northeast raised questions about the importance of industrial development versus agricultural development. Oftentimes, as Paulo Frederico Maciel’s arguments illustrate, the need for industrial development was brought into question by the supposed lack of a modern labor force in the Northeast.²²⁴ The steady flow of

²²¹ Ministerio de Educação e Cultura: Paulo Frederico Maciel, “Um informe sobre alguns problemas do Nordeste” (Recife: Instituto IJNPS, 1956), 51.

²²² Ibid., 52.

²²³ Ibid., 58.

²²⁴ In a conversation between Gilberto Freyre and the U.S. Ambassador James Loeb on 25 February 1963, Ambassador Loeb supposedly asked Freyre about industrialization in the Northeast. “Freyre mentioned that abundant cheap labor, in

Nordestinos to the south, to Brasília, and to the urban areas of the Northeast, and the belief in the need for modernization to prevent social revolution meant that proposals for the development of industry in the Northeast were considered and at times, widely celebrated. But, similar to the proposals for agricultural development, the main problem was seen as resting in the people and their doubtful capacity to modernize.²²⁵

With Celso Furtado's proposal for industrial development in the Northeast in 1959 known as the GTDN report (Grupo de Trabalho para o Desenvolvimento do Nordeste; Study Group for the Development of the Northeast) – the building blocks of the establishment of SUDENE (Superintendencia de Desenvolvimento Economico do Nordeste; Northeast Development Agency) – the immediate reaction was that the Northeast was not “ready” for industrial development. As Mário Lacerda de Melo argued, the Northeast was underdeveloped because of the backwardness and “primitivism” of its people, and any economic development had to incorporate social and cultural change.²²⁶ But, SUDENE was approved by the Brazilian Congress in

the first place, and a proportionally high concentration of population, making for a large potential market. What about the availability of skilled labor, asked the Ambassador. Mr. Delgado-Arias observed that the Northeasterner has been the great manpower source for the burgeoning São Paulo industry, where the “Nordestino” has been trained and has shown a good disposition to learn.” (p.3) Brazil. U.S. Embassy. Classified General Records, 1941-1963. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, 1962-1963. Confidential memorandum of conversation at Gilberto Freyre's home, 25 Feb 1963, about “Problems of the Northeast.” Participants: prof. and mrs. Gilberto Freyre, Ambassador and Mrs. James Loeb, D. Eugene Delgado-Arias, American Consul General. RG 84, Box 134, Folder 350 Brazil Feb 1963. National Archives.

²²⁵ As Tânia Bacelar de Araújo claims, the “modernization” that occurred in the Northeast from 1960 to 1992 was uneven and in certain agricultural systems – cane, cacao and cotton – the production expanded significantly without “modernization” to the system of production. Araújo, “Northeast, Northeast,” 23.

²²⁶ Mário Lacerda do Melo, “Sobre a industrialização do Nordeste,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 6 February 1959, 4.

1959 and widely celebrated throughout Northeastern Brazil as the development project that would bring modernization and socio-economic change to Northeastern Brazil. In Riordan Roett's analysis of SUDENE, he argued that SUDENE had to be seen as an "essential ingredient of modernization" in terms of the political development of Northeastern Brazil, defined as "increasing governmental efficiency in utilizing the human and material resources of the nation for national goals."²²⁷ The purpose was related to social unrest in underdeveloped regions of Brazil that was seen as a potential threat to national economic productivity and stability.²²⁸

According to Celso Furtado, the goals of SUDENE focused on how "to create an economy resistant to the drought, and to restructure the agrarian economy and intensify industrial investments."²²⁹ Furtado saw the main problem in Brazilian economic development as being related to the emphasis on industrial development in the Center-South and a steady loss of assets from the Northeast to the Center-South.²³⁰ The 1961 SUDENE plan focused mainly on the development of infrastructure in the Northeast, namely road building and electric power expansion.²³¹ Social development was the next priority which mostly focused on constructing water

²²⁷ Political development quoted from A.F.K. Organski, *The Stages of Political Development*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 7, in Riordan Roett, *The Politics of Foreign Aid in the Brazilian Northeast* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1972), 4.

²²⁸ Roberto de Oliveira Campos, "A crise economica brasileira," *Alguns Problemas Brasileiros*, Vol. I, Confederação Nacional de Comercio, (Rio de Janeiro, 1959), 63-65 cited in Stefan H. Robock, *Brazil's Developing Northeast: A Study of Regional Planning and Foreign Aid* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 1963), 111.

²²⁹ Celso Furtado, *Seminário para o Desenvolvimento do Nordeste*, 1959-Anais-Vol. II, Confederação Nacional da Indústria (Rio de Janeiro, 1959), 226 cited in Robock, *Brazil's Developing Northeast*, 107.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 114-115.

and sewage systems, and the third main priority was transforming the agricultural system, including colonization programs in the state of Maranhão and some agrarian reform in the cane producing region in terms of creating cooperatives.²³²

But, the underlying reason for the priority given to SUDENE by the Brazilian and US governments was the threat of revolution supposedly posed by the level of inequality and what were labeled “communist” rural social movements. As Riordan Roett demonstrated in his study on the relations between SUDENE and US AID, the Brazilians felt that “subversion” was a Brazilian problem that needed to be solved by Brazilians and the US government considered Northeastern Brazil “an international security problem” that needed foreign assistance and aid to solve.²³³ According to studies on the relations between US AID and SUDENE, the Americans feared that SUDENE was being infiltrated by “communists”²³⁴ and that SUDENE was not acting quickly enough to convince Nordestinos that social revolution was not the solution to poverty. Celso Furtado and SUDENE found that US AID was unwilling to collaborate with SUDENE in plans for development. US AID agents had limited

²³² Ibid., 115-116.

²³³ Roett, *The Politics of Foreign Aid*, 92.

²³⁴ For example, in a Foreign Service dispatch about on a meeting with Celso Furtado, U.S. Consular officials stated a concern that Furtado was “open” to trade with the Soviet Union. “There seems reasonable possibility based on history Soviet foreign economic program (e.g., India, Indonesia, Egypt, Argentina) that Soviet bloc soon may come forward with concrete offer assist solution Northeast problem. Press accounts Furtado visit highlighting food offers with critical local comment may be present stage setting this possibility. Local press today featuring probability reestablishment Brazil-USSR diplomatic relations with obvious implication this move likely will lead to others.” Brazil. U.S. Embassy. Classified General Records, 1941-1963. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State. Secret Telegram Foreign Service of US From Recife 27 July 1961, Reference CONDES 32 re: Soviet interest in Northeast and dispatch 31 and 35 re: comments on Furtado visit. RG 84, Box 122, Folder 320 Brazil-USSR 1959-61. National Archives.

knowledge of Portuguese and seemed more interested in short-term propaganda instead of long-term structural changes. Roett's evaluation of foreign aid was that in the case of Northeastern Brazil, foreign aid hindered the modernization process, because "modernization is best manipulated and directed from within the given society."²³⁵

Consular reports on SUDENE questioned the effectiveness of the program from its inception in 1960. At the same time that the U.S. government was investing billions of dollars in aid projects, consular reports emphasized their skepticism about the feasibility of any development project in Northeastern Brazil, for agriculture or industrialization.²³⁶ These reports saw "education" as the only solution for the problems of the Northeast. As a 1960 report described:

The more scientifically trained observer, after innumerable expeditions through the area making soil tests and analyses, is inclined to doubt that the Northeast can ever feed and/or support its present or future (larger) population by agriculture – no matter how much benefited by modern technology. (...) The industrialization foreseen would be an alien branch grafted onto the native tree, far from its sources of supply and its natural markets. The grafting operation might be successful

²³⁵ Roett, *The Politics of Foreign Aid*, 172-173.

²³⁶ Brazil. U.S. Embassy. Classified General Records, 1941-1963. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State. Memorandum To Minister Saccio From Herbert K. May, Confidential, 28 June 1961, "A suggested program for US Economic Activities in the Brazilian Northeast," RG 84, Box 122, 350.30.16. National Archives.

Brazil. U.S. Embassy. Classified General Records, 1941-1963. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State. Foreign Service Despatch Amconsul Recife to Dept of State, CERP Section D IV A. 19 May 1959. "Developing NE Brazil: Agrarain Reform and redistribution of income." RG 84, Box 122, 350.30.16 03-05. National Archives. The report states: "In the long run education would do more than any other single thing to promote the development of the Northeast. It must include mass primary education, technical and industrial training for labor, agricultural extenstion for the farms, advanced technical and industrial training for managers and supervisors, and professional training for teachers, scientists, and other consultants." (p.5)

and the entire plant may flourish beautifully, but then again, it may only survive with nursery protective measures, a delicate greenhouse creation, or it may quickly wither and die, never having taken root in the native plant, despite the best efforts of highly trained botanists.²³⁷ In many of the consular analyses of development projects for the Northeast, “experts” suggested that the only possibility for modernization was through education because of regional conditions. At the same time, education was also seen as a precarious undertaking because

There is a tremendous psychological resistance to education in the Northeast. The resistance is two-fold. First, a large number of the poorest people have no particular desire at the present moment to improve their economic status. Thus, besides the normal antipathy toward new ways, there is also a lack of economic motivation. Second, the wealthier and better educated people seem to believe that the poor, the “matutos”, are incapable of being educated.²³⁸

Education: Rural and Urban

In both rural and urban plans for development in the 1950s and 1960s, one of the major concerns for the feasibility of modernization in the Northeast involved the backwardness of the Nordestino population. According to most modernization theorists, educational and training programs could provide a solution. Starting in 1955, numerous education programs and technical training schools were established

²³⁷ Brazil. U.S. Embassy. Classified General Records, 1941-1963. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State. Report by Edward T Walters, American Vice Counsel, 12 Sept 1960, “The Brazilian Northeast: The Necessity for a U.S. decision,” RG 84, Box 128, Folder 430.3 Military Bases and Posts 1959-61, p.3. National Archives.

²³⁸ Brazil. U.S. Embassy. Classified General Records, 1941-1963. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State. Foreign Service Dispatch Amconsul Recife to Dept of State, CERP Section D IV A. 19 May 1959. “Developing NE Brazil: Agrarian Reform and redistribution of income.” RG 84, Box 122, 350.30.16 03-05. National Archives.

throughout the Northeast. Most articles on the problems of the Northeast in the *Diario de Pernambuco* emphasized the state's abandonment of its people, and the solution was located in rural education which would stop the rural exodus to the cities and create a better standard of living for rural workers and families. A new technical agricultural school was established in Vitória de Santo Antão, near the birthplace of the Ligas Camponesas, in 1955.²³⁹ Modern technology – radio and cinema – provided a new approach to reaching a broader sector of the population. While some of these education programs, such as the adult literacy programs associated with Paulo Freire, have often been depicted as “revolutionary,” an analysis in the context of modernization discourses shows that these projects were also “evolutionary.”

In a 1956 interview with Paulo Freire (then, the director of the Serviço Social de Industria de Pernambuco - SESI), Robert Alexander described Freire's perspective on the role of industrialization and urban education.²⁴⁰ According to the interview, industrialization had broken the paternalistic bond that had been a stabilizing component of Northeastern society. The factory worker became a number and lost the personal relationship with his boss, and according to Freire, the sudden loss of paternalism threatened to cause chaos because it derailed the authority of the father and led to a “demoralization” of the family. Thus, Freire's objective was to build programs to replace paternalism, or to partake in what he supposedly referred to as a “slow evolution” to prevent revolution. As director of SESI, Freire established educational centers to instruct the new industrial labor force not only in literacy but

²³⁹ “Escola rural doméstica de Vitória de Santo Antão,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 6 January 1955, 3.

²⁴⁰ Interview with Paulo Freire, Recife. 18 February 1956. Robert J. Alexander Interview Collection, Rutgers University. Box 5, Folder 53.

also in voting and politics and social norms about raising families, neighborhood problems, and culture. Freire organized local training centers in which the community members participated in organizing what types of programs were important for the community; i.e., some communities organized sports and recreational activities while others organized music and dances.

Rural education programs in the Northeast emphasized the need for technical training over literacy. The plan in 1957 to combat the “ignorance of the cabolclo,” was to start an adult and adolescent literacy program, to start a rural education program, and to create a radio education program. As Minister Clovis Salgado explained in an article linking education to national security:

É claro que para mudar a mentalidade rotineira do nosso homem rural não basta alfabetizá-lo; mas a posse das técnicas rudimentares do ler, escrever e contar será o primeiro passo para que compreenda e se integre, progressivamente no mundo moderno, nos seus conhecimentos, confortos e aspirações. De que modo, a não ser pela educação, será possível extripar um velho hábito, dos mais perniciosos, como o de queimar campos e derrubadas para o plantio das roças e pastagens.²⁴¹

Salgado insisted that literacy programs were not enough to change Northeastern Brazil; education had to be accompanied by a modernization of agriculture.

Likewise, Anibal Fernandes argued in an editorial in the *Diario de Pernambuco* that agricultural development could create a more politicized populace. He noted the case of the agro-industry of onions that transformed people living along the São Francisco

²⁴¹ Clovis Salgado, “Educação e Segurança Nacional,” *Revista MEC*, Ano II, no.7, (September/October, 1957).

River Valley from “autenticos ‘jeca-tatus’” to prosperous men who participate in politics, “even electing their own deputies.”²⁴²

Paulo Freire, the author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and the creator of adult literacy programs based on *conscientização*, is often depicted as a revolutionary educator, and labeled a “Communist” although Freire himself clearly stated he was staunchly Catholic and not a Communist. His goal was to raise the political consciousness of the illiterate, connecting literacy training to politics. Recent studies have labeled Freire a “Romantic-Utopian,” comparing Freire to J.J. Rousseau and William Morris whose “nineteenth century connection to the English working class resembles Freire’s twentieth century Catholic-Marxist mystique.”²⁴³ Peter Lownds also notes the influence of Franz Fanon and Josué de Castro on Freire’s pedagogical approach.²⁴⁴ But, unlike Fanon and some of more revolutionary actors in the 1960s, Freire made no reference to race relations in his early works. He also worked with Francisco Brennand to create the graphic representations for *Educação como prática da liberdade* (1967), a Pernambucan artist associated with the conservative cultural movement, the Armorial movement.²⁴⁵

Many who uphold the idea of Freire as a “revolutionary” educator claim that his educational programs in Northeastern Brazil need to be read from within the historical context of the early 1960, where “insurgencies” and rebellions flourished in the region. At the same time, arguments about his “idealism” are also connected to

²⁴² Anibal Fernandes, “Atividades Agrícolas e Industriais no Nordeste,” *Diário de Pernambuco*, 5 Maio 1959, 4.

²⁴³ Peter Michael Lownds, “In the Shadow of Freire: Popular Educators and Literacy in Northeastern Brazil,” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2006), xii.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

this era. While I agree that historical context is crucial, I argue that it is necessary to go a step further and understand this historical context before making claims about the revolutionary nature of Freire's education programs. In other words, as other critics of Freire have argued, he was more of a conformist than a revolutionary educator. In comparison with some of the other social movements of the early 1960s, Freire's programs were only revolutionary in the sense that the programs focused on trying to teach Nordestinos how to read and write, but in terms of many of the political messages and techniques, the programs carried more of a status quo message. As Freire's critics have claimed, "the pedagogical relationship [for the MCP] is one in which the learner is constructed as passive, silent, ignorant, unaware, inexperienced, possibly fearful ut acquiescent [whereas] the educator is active, in control, free, aware, experienced, wise, fearless, and self-sacrificing."²⁴⁶

Tia Malkin-Fontecchio has studied the numerous urban education reforms and programs that started in the early 1960s in Recife including the Movimento de Cultura Popular (MCP) sponsored by the municipal government of Recife; the Promoção Agnes of the local and US Presbyterian Church; SUDENE, and the US AID. She argues that the educational reforms were a part of the broader social, economic and political changes of the era.²⁴⁷ Malkin-Fontecchio divides the programs into "revolutionary" or "literacy for social change" versus "status quo" or "literacy

²⁴⁶ Diana Coben, *Radical Heroes: Gramsci, Freire, and the Politics of Adult Education* (NY: Garland, 1998), 112-113 cited in Peter Michael Lownds, "In the Shadow of Freire: Popular Educators and Literacy in Northeastern Brazil," (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2006), 89.

²⁴⁷ Tia Malkin-Fontecchio, "Citizens or Workers? The Politics of Education in Northeastern Brazil, 1959-1964," (Ph.D. diss. Brown University, 2003), 21.

for development.”²⁴⁸ While some of the projects were associated with the “revolutionary” Leftist governments, the division does not seem as clear when examined in light of modernization theory. Even the MCP had the goal of “awakening the people” and guiding them to participate in the political process.

The *Boletim do Serviço de Extensão Cultural da Universidade do Recife* published its objectives in 1962: a. to promote cultural awareness and action between the University and the povo; b. to develop the regional culture and regional mentality through lectures, publications, courses and scientific studies; and c. to create courses and seminars that study the reality of Brazilian culture.²⁴⁹ In 1964, a number of the courses and publications were reprinted in the Bulletin, with cards that presented the early development of the “Paulo Freire method” that was being implemented in the Northeast. In most of the diagrams, people are divided in two categories, similar to Modernization Theory’s “traditional” and “modern.” For example, one diagram shows a flow chart of “Animal” (described as a person who lacks contact with the world) ⇒ Instinct ⇒ Adaptation compared with “Man” (described as someone having relations with the world) ⇒ Reflection ⇒ Integration.²⁵⁰ The card further describes the difference between animal and man. The reactions of an animal are based only on contact; they are direct, simple, immediate and based on instinct. The animal sees that he has to adapt to the world, make an adjustment and accommodate the new situation. On the other hand the reactions of humans are active, dynamic and

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ *Boletim do Serviço de Extensão Cultural da Universidade do Recife*. No. 1, March-April, 1962. National Library. Rio de Janeiro.

²⁵⁰ “Apresentação de Cartazes: Roteiro de Exposição para o sistema Paulo Freire,” *Boletim do Serviço de Extensão Cultural da Universidade do Recife*. No. 5, January-February, 1964. National Library (Rio de Janeiro). Cartaz no. 1.

produce a change as a human being. This capacity of man comes from reflection (intelligence, inventiveness) and the ability to use technical or other tools. All tools are made by men and become factors of ways of expressing his life. The “moral” of the story is that in going through the process of “humanization,” it is also necessary to “humanize” the objects produced by men so that they cannot be used against him. (Examples given of such technologies that need to be “humanized” include nuclear power and media such as radio, television, and cinema.)

Similar to Modernization Theory, Freire’s method also rested upon a transition in society, that he labeled in three stages: “closed society,” “society in transition,” and “open society.”²⁵¹ In the categories, the difference between (Protestant) modernization theory and (Catholic) Freirean theory is clear. A “closed” society is characterized by an economy based on exportation and the subordination to imperialism; an oppressed population, alienated culture, and traditional educational system. The “society in transition” has industrialization, an “emerging” people, it is pre-revolutionary, and people are reacting and starting to question the traditional education system. In the “open society,” people are active, there is economic, social and political freedom, democracy and an educational system that helps create society. According to Freire, this transition took place in São Paulo in the 1920s and 30s, marked by the labor strikes and unionization as well as the Semana de Arte

²⁵¹ “Apresentação de Cartazes: Roteiro de Exposição para o sistema Paulo Freire,” *Boletim do Serviço de Extensão Cultural da Universidade do Recife*. No. 5, January-February, 1964. National Library (Rio de Janeiro). Cartaz no. 2.

Moderna.²⁵² The transitions exemplify the move toward democracy and “open society” and an affirmation of nationalism and national values.

Similar to views of man’s individual transformation in Modernization Theory, Freire also offered a diagram of “traditional” versus “modern” man, although Freire’s version was based on “individualism” versus “collective.” In the first diagram, a man is depicted working while another man rests. The words on the card read: Isolation, Individualism, Possession of Something, Imposition, Escape, Incomplete. The card explains that individualists overvalue themselves and are deceived by the thought of having things and wanting personal gain. They acquire an attitude of imposition, arrogance and escapism or incompleteness, losing any type of vision that includes other humans and humanity in general. On the other side of the card, an illustration portrays two men working together above a different list of words: Communication; Solidarity; the Search for Something; Comprehension; Fidelity; Completeness. To be human means to establish a dialogue of communication and of solidarity with other humans. Humans working on creating solidarity are defined by the spirit of comprehension, respect, valorization of others, reciprocal trust, and the search for a completeness in life. This completeness is always something man searches for; he never closes himself or relies only on himself, but is always open to others for everything.²⁵³

²⁵² “Apresentação de Cartazes: Roteiro de Exposição para o sistema Paulo Freire,” *Boletim do Serviço de Extensão Cultural da Universidade do Recife*. No. 5, January-February, 1964. National Library (Rio de Janeiro). Cartaz no. 2.

²⁵³ “Apresentação de Cartazes: Roteiro de Exposição para o sistema Paulo Freire,” *Boletim do Serviço de Extensão Cultural da Universidade do Recife*. No. 5, January-February, 1964. National Library (Rio de Janeiro). Cartaz No. 4.

The idea that societies can be neatly divided into two categories (with a third intermediate transitional stage), and that Northeastern Brazil is in the process of going through the transition in the 1950s and 1960s is a similarity between U.S. modernization theory and Paulo Freire's method. Both theories emphasize the role of education in the transition period, both depict societies at the macro and personal behavior levels, and both refer to technology. The difference lies in how these theories define what changes should be made in society and the view of what was considered an "ideal" society. Whereas modernization theorists, by in large, advocated a transition from communal, "patriarchal" societies to modern, individualist societies, Paulo Freire proposed a transition from individualistic societies to communal societies.

A Symbol for Northeastern "Modernity": Delmiro Gouveia

"Abrindo a *Coleção Brasil Para Todos* a mim coube *Antônio Conselheiro*, símbolo do Nordeste antigo e sofredor; e em continuação – bela continuidade –, ao poeta Mauro Mota cabe a figura máscula e extraordinária de Delmiro Gouveia, símbolo da ação e do novo Nordeste."²⁵⁴

The opening of the massive public works project, the CHESF (Companhia Hidrelétrica do São Francisco S.A.) which installed the Paulo Afonso hydroelectric dam on the São Francisco River in Northeastern Brazil in January 1955, was celebrated as a sign of modernization arriving in the region. But the construction of the dam invoked memories of the original hydroelectric dam established on the São

²⁵⁴ Mauro Mota, *Quem foi Delmiro Gouveia?* (São Paulo: Empresa Grafica Carioca, 1967), 43.

Francisco, a project initiated by the industrialist Delmiro Gouveia in 1917. From the 1950s to 1960s, numerous articles on Delmiro Gouveia appeared not only in the Northeastern mainstream papers, but also in the major newspapers of in the South, in radical periodicals, and in *literatura de cordel*.²⁵⁵ An impressive number of adulatory biographies on Delmiro Gouveia were published from the 1950s to 1970s, most drawing from an earlier works such as Plínio Calvacanti's *A Canaã sertaneja da pedra* (1927), historical newspaper articles and oral histories conducted in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1961, a contest was held by the Companhia Hidrelétrica do São Francisco, for the best monographs on Delmiro Gouveia and in 1961, the government of Alagoas, transmitted the stories over the radio.²⁵⁶ And on the June 5, 1963, a celebration of the centenary of Gouveia's birth was held in Alagoas. The famous Northeastern singer, Luis Gonzaga composed a song about "Paulo Alfonso," in which he described Delmiro Gouveia as coming up with the idea for the dam that brought industry and modernity to the Northeast.²⁵⁷ In February of 1964, the Instituto Joaquim Nabuco led a conference on Delmiro Gouveia, proclaiming that he was a man who could symbolize the Northeast.²⁵⁸ In the 1970s, Maurício Segall won third prize that the Concurso de Dramaturgia de Serviço Nacional de Teatro for his play about Delmiro Gouveia, *O coronel dos coronéis*, and Orlando Senna and Geraldo

²⁵⁵ For example, *O Jornal* (Rio) and *O correio da Manhã* (Rio) published interviews with Gouveia's daughter in 1955 after the inauguration of the Paulo Afonso dam. Cited in J.C. Alencar Araripe, *A glória de um pioneiro: A vida de Delmiro Gouveia* (Rio de Janeiro: Edições O Cruzeiro, 1965).

²⁵⁶ Telma de Barros Correia, *Pedra: Plano e cotidiano operário no sertão* (São Paulo: Papyrus Editora, 1998), 291.

²⁵⁷ J. Machado de Sousa, *Vida de Delmiro Gouveia* (Recife: s.n. publisher, 1964), 97.

²⁵⁸ Costa Porto, "Ainda Delmiro Gouveia," *Diário de Pernambuco* 8 February 1964, 4.

Sarno's film, *Coronel Delmiro Gouveia* was a prizewinner at the 1978 Festival de Brasília.²⁵⁹ Gouveia even became the theme of a samba school in Rio de Janeiro in 1979.²⁶⁰ In 1993, the Federação das Indústrias de Pernambuco, *O Diário de Pernambuco*, FUNDAJ and BANDEPE started a “Prêmio Delmiro Gouveia de Vanguarda Industrial,” to award to industries that are innovative in terms of quality, labor relations and community integration.²⁶¹

While Delmiro Gouveia was not the only industrialist in Northeastern Brazil whose projects stretched back to the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, he turned into a symbol during the Cold War, in part because of the factory town being located in the sertão, and in part because of the new hydroelectric dam on the São Francisco River. José Sergio Leite Lopes's work on Paulista, an industrial city in Pernambuco, and on its owner, Herman Lundgren shows that other Northeastern industrialists shared certain similarities in terms of their depictions in the 1950s and 1960s, but a few notable differences suggest why Delmiro Gouveia was promoted as the symbol of the Northeast.²⁶² For one, Lundgren was Swiss by origin, which in contrast to Delmiro Gouveia who was from the sertão, changed the narrative of the hero of the Northeast. Paulista is also closer to Recife and Olinda and in the coastal region, and the other factory town of Lundgren, near Sapé, Paraíba, was also located in the agreste region, which have different connotation in terms of industrial

²⁵⁹ Correia, *Pedra*, 290.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 291.

²⁶² According to Leite Lopes, Raul de Góes published a book on Lundgren and Paulista in 1964, “de forma a construir um herói da indústria brasileira à semelhança de Mauá, Teófilo Otoni e Delmiro Gouveia.” José Sergio Leite Lopes, *A tecelagem dos conflitos de classe na cidade das chaminés* (Brasília: Editora Marco Zero; Editora Universidade de Brasília; MCT/CNPq, 1988), 97.

development than the sertão. Leite Lopes illustrates this difference by discussing how factory workers from the sertão were treated in comparison to those from the urban areas, reproducing the stereotype that the sertanejo was barbaric and backwards, unfit for modern industry. Furthermore, the Paulista textile factory did not meet the same fate as Delmiro Gouveia's Estrela in the sertão. The death of Delmiro Gouveia and the destruction of the textile factory supported the regional narrative that attempts for change were predetermined for failure and that imperialistic forces needed to keep Northeastern Brazil a underdeveloped region.

By examining the depictions of Delmiro Gouveia from the 1950s to the 1970s, it is possible to see the competing visions of what an ideal modern society would entail in Northeastern Brazil. Through the narratives, the authors also describe what they see as the major challenges or hindrances to modernity in the Northeast. From a broader perspective, the representations of Delmiro Gouveia show how historical symbols and narratives contribute to the construction and re-construction of regional identity in Northeastern Brazil. As the region faced major changes in terms of industrialization and modernization, the main social actors sought historical references to validate the *Nordestinidade* of modernity. What follows is not a historical examination of Delmiro Gouveia, but an analysis of how historians, social movement leaders, filmmakers, and journalists depicted the symbol of Delmiro Gouveia in the 1950s to the 1970s. Through this analysis, it is possible to see the meaning of modernization for the Northeast.

One of the final chapters of Telma de Barros Correia's study of Brazilian factory towns and Pedra – now known as Delmiro Gouveia – addresses the

representations of Delmiro Gouveia.²⁶³ Correia argues that the literature can be divided into two main categories: status quo and Leftist nationalist. The status quo authors portray Gouveia as a super-man and use accounts that furthered the “bourgeois myth of social climbing as possible for the poor Nordesteño.” Leftist authors depicted Gouveia as a victim of decadent oligarchies and as a “martyr” of the anti-imperialist struggle, showing how Gouveia’s factory town failed when he died because it was not actually a factory run by the workers themselves.²⁶⁴ Correia shows how more recent authors have focused on Delmiro Gouveia’s sexuality or depicted him as a symbol of a precursor to the environmental movement.²⁶⁵ She locates the reason for the multiple interpretations of Delmiro Gouveia in Gouveia’s ability to be a “master of marketing,” a person who used the idea of modernity to capture the “dreams and hopes” of men of his time and of future projects for the Brazilian nation.²⁶⁶ While Correia’s work reveals the multifarious interpretations of the symbol of Delmiro Gouveia, I argue that when put into the context of debates over modernity and projects associated with “modernization” in the 1950s to the 1970s, the representations of Delmiro Gouveia acquire new meanings. The fact that his story has been appropriated in numerous ways that demonstrate the overlap between regional and national is also not surprising when put in the context of regional identity and the use of historical symbols. In other words, Delmiro Gouveia may have been a “regional myth” who turned into “a national myth...for those who defend the Brazilian capitalist development,” as Maurício Segall claimed. But, by

²⁶³ Correia, *Pedra*.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 291-295.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 298-299.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 299.

contextualizing the multiple representations of Gouveia, who used these representations, what they emphasized about Gouveia and how the representations changed over time, it is possible to better understand the debates in the 1950s to 1970s over “modernization” and how these debates informed discourses of regional and national identity during this period.

Delmiro Gouveia: The Man

Representations of Delmiro Gouveia often portrayed him as the model for the Northeast. Olympio de Menezes cited Gustavo Barroso’s characterization: “Delmiro Gouveia foi um tipo, no físico, no moral, e no mental, verdadeiramente representativo da forte e tenaz sub-raça do infeliz Nordeste brasileiro. Aspecto acaboclado, energia indomável e inteligência aguda.”²⁶⁷ Gilberto Freyre, among others, referred to him in English as a “self-made man.” Gouveia substituted the fanaticism and banditry of the sertão with modern industrial civilization, “based on science and technology.”²⁶⁸ Supposedly, common sayings about Delmiro Gouveia painted him as the “King of the Sertão” or the “Governor of the Sertão.”

Illustrating how Gouveia fits into the regional image, another saying commonly cited in the books on Gouveia in the 1950s and 60s declared: “O Nordeste até hoje deu tres homens; Padre Cícero na oração; Lampião na valentia; e Delmiro Gouveia no trabalho.”²⁶⁹ Another compared Delmiro Gouveia to Antonio

²⁶⁷ Olympio de Menezes, *Itinerário de Delmiro Gouveia* (Recife: Instituto Joaquim Nabuco de Pesquisas Sociais, 1963), 73.

²⁶⁸ Tadeu Rocha, *Delmiro Gouveia: Pioneiro de Paulo Afonso* (Maceió: Departamento Estadual de Cultura, 1953; second edition Recife, 1963), 113.

²⁶⁹ J. Machado de Sousa, *Vida de Delmiro Gouveia* (Recife: s.n. publisher, 1964), 97.

Conselheiro of Canudos: “Delmiro Gouveia já foi incorporado ao folclore social do Nordeste, assim como um Antônio Conselheiro pertence ao folclore mágico e um Lampião ao heróico.”²⁷⁰ But, at the same time, other authors pointed out that he was not a “fanatic” like Padre Cicero or Antonio Conselheiro. Instead, similar to Euclides da Cunha, he saw the sertanejo as “abandoned” and “constantly fatigued” but as capable of being transformed into a constructive force able to lift up the Northeast.²⁷¹ One account made this comparison by saying that people had come to Canudos to marvel at the size of the immense Church whereas in Pedra, people admired the large storage units to store cotton and manufactured products.²⁷² He was described as the “creator of a perfect community,” “someone who knew how to impose order and consolidate the progress” announced on the national flag, and a “superior man.”

The *Ligas Camponesas* newspaper, in reviewing F. Magalhães Martins’s biography of Delmiro Gouveia also described his exceptional “Brazilian-ness”: “A vida de Delmiro Gouveia, exemplo de brasilidade, de coragem, de dinamismo, a vida deste educador precursor entre nos dos mais avançados serviços sociais”.²⁷³ But, perhaps wary of the possibility for Leftist groups to appropriate the symbol of Delmiro Gouveia into a revolutionary hero, the *Diario de Pernambuco* focused on the idea that Gouveia supported order and was a businessman, not a revolutionary. The *Diario de Pernambuco* described Gouveia as a type of hero or symbol of the Northeast, but claimed that he was never interested in “politica militante, interessado

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 112.

²⁷¹ Menezes, *Itinerário de Delmiro Gouveia*, 153-155.

²⁷² Felix Lima Júnior, *Delmiro Gouveia: O Mauá do sertão Alagoano* (Maceio: Departamento Estadual de Cultura, 1963), 194.

²⁷³ Wânia Filizola, “Delmiro Gouveia: Pioneiro e Nacionalista,” *LIGA* 14 August 1963, 5.

apenas em negocias, em ganhar dinheiro, em alargar o campo de ação, consolidando a invejável posição economica.”²⁷⁴ According to the editor of the *Diario de Pernambuco*, Gouveia was a lover of popularity and not of the illusory applauses of the masses. While he had good intentions, he wanted to work more than anything, to make profits and to do that he needed peace, collaboration and order.²⁷⁵

While some accounts emphasized his roots in Ipu, others compared Gouveia to figures outside of the Northeast; for instance, Moises, David (of David and Goliath) and Plato in that he was “born politicized.”²⁷⁶ The well-known media giant, Assis Chateaubriand, supposedly declared Pedra a “magisterial response to Canudos” and compared Delmiro Gouveia to a bandeirante.²⁷⁷ Although many of the authors emphasized Gouveia’s connections to the United States and Europe, they show how Gouveia initiated, formed and used these relations to bring modernity to the Northeast. Gouveia contracted technical professionals from numerous countries to make the dam and the town; the foreigners did not “exploit” him. Gouveia supposedly “improved” typical English sayings, changing the idea of “time is money,” into “time is more than money.”²⁷⁸ One account even states that Gouveia hired a chauffeur from Germany.²⁷⁹ The reason to mention this is to show that Gouveia used foreigners in the project of creating Northeastern modernity, that he

²⁷⁴ Costa Porto, “Delmiro e a política pernambucana,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 13 February 1964, 4

²⁷⁵ Costa Porto, “Delmiro envolvido nas tramas da política,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 13 February 1964, 4.

²⁷⁶ Sousa, *Vida de Delmiro Gouveia*, 5-8.

²⁷⁷ Menezes, *Itinerário de Delmiro Gouveia*, 139.

²⁷⁸ Rocha, *Delmiro Gouveia*, 103.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

knew how to control these foreign investors and technicians to help him to complete his project of bringing modern civilization to the Northeast.

The Early Years

The biographies invariably start with Gouveia's family, his place of birth, and his childhood. Authors emphasize that he comes from a small town in Northeastern Brazil, Ipu, Ceará, and that his family was of "modest" origins, working the land and raising livestock. Biographers foreground his "nationalist" origins by emphasizing that his father volunteered to fight in the Paraguayan War. In some accounts, his father fought with a Northeastern brigade that "won fame as soon as they arrived as the battalion with the best maneuvers."²⁸⁰ One account describes Ipu as the quintessential representation of the racially mixed Brazilian nation, "a society of ranchers and farmers, who mixed the blood of three races and the cultures of three continents."²⁸¹

After establishing Delmiro Gouveia as a nationalist from the sertão, most accounts turn to showing how Gouveia became the "Rei das Peles" in Recife at the turn of the century. Tadeu Rocha described this process as Delmiro Gouveia becoming aware of the inhumane quality of life in Recife, the need for modernization, and the intellectual ideologies of socialism.²⁸² Gouveia supposedly started working

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 22.

²⁸¹ Ibid., 18.

²⁸² Rocha describes Recife in the 1870s as a place where industry and modern civilization was introduced at the same time that slums, misery and disease also

as a station manager of the “Brazilian Street Railway Company” as a young man.²⁸³

Authors emphasize the fact that Gouveia made numerous trips to the United States and Europe; for instance, he attended the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893. He also made connections with international firms and banks such as J.H. Rossbach Brothers of New York and Keen Sutterly & Co. of Philadelphia to establish his company, Delmiro Gouveia & Cia in 1894.²⁸⁴ His home in Recife was described as European, with emphasis on its cleanliness and order.²⁸⁵ F. Magalhães Martins portrayed Delmiro Gouveia’s early business initiatives as part of his “dream” of “modernizing the life of his beloved Recife.”²⁸⁶ According to these accounts, modernity for Delmiro Gouveia meant introducing electricity, hygiene and business, modeled on U.S. and European cities.

The next major step in most accounts of Delmiro Gouveia was the creation of the Mercado de Derby, the fire that destroyed it, and Gouveia’s arrest in Recife. Due to the high prices of the basic foodstuffs at the Mercado de São José in Recife and the inability of the poor to purchase this food, Delmiro Gouveia established a new market at Derby where basic necessities were sold at prices below those of the Mercado de

increased. Gouveia became literate with the help of José Vicente Meira de Vasconcelos, who supposedly was a socialist. Ibid., 32-35.

²⁸³ Ibid., 39-40.

²⁸⁴ F. Magalhães Martins, *Delmiro Gouveia: pioneiro e nacionalista* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Civilização Brasileira, 1963), 42-47.

²⁸⁵ “Pelo asseio, pela limpeza impecável, pensava-se estar numa villa alemã na Baviera, num chalé suíço em Schaffuse, na casa de um cultivador de tulipas em Haarlem, na Holanda,” Felix Lima Júnior, *Delmiro Gouveia: O Mauá do sertão Alagoano* (Maceio: Departamento Estadual de Cultura, 1963), 51.

²⁸⁶ Drawing from an earlier work on Delmiro Gouveia, Martins quotes Plínio Calvacanti, “Ele concebeu a idéia grandiosa de transformar o Recife numa cidade moderna, com higiene, com electricidade e com o conforto dos grandes centros civilizados.” Martins, *Delmiro Gouveia: pioneiro e nacionalista*, 55-56.

São José. Felix Lima Júnior described the market as impeccably clean and organized, with electricity, sewers, and running water. It was supposedly modeled on European and U.S. markets and in the plaza in front of the market, Gouveia built a recreational area where people partook in fiestas resembling “American fairs,” with clowns, and a carousel, and stands selling popcorn.²⁸⁷ According to Olympio de Menezes, the Derby market came from Delmiro Gouveia’s vision to modernize Recife after visiting the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893.²⁸⁸

Some accounts use Derby to emphasize the fact that Delmiro Gouveia had a social consciousness and concern for the poor. Outraged by the prices at São José, Gouveia intervened in the market and provided meat and manioc flour at lower prices so that the poor people could eat.²⁸⁹ As Araripe claimed, Delmiro Gouveia was a “comerciante progressista e de alta visão, que sem decurar de seus legítimos interesses pessoais cuidava de servir ao povo com dedicação e descortino.”²⁹⁰ Olympio de Menezes described the power that Delmiro Gouveia held in Northeastern society at the time of the Mercado de Derby as based on his ability to gain the support of the *povo*.²⁹¹ The people supposedly created him as a mystic figure able to provide them with meat at one-third of the price offered at São José.

But, after the fire on January 1, 1900, a controversy arose. According to Araripe, the flames quickly “devoured the structure that was the pride of Recife and

²⁸⁷ Lima Júnior, *Delmiro Gouveia: O Mauá*, 62-64.

²⁸⁸ Menezes, *Itinerário de Delmiro Gouveia*, 53.

²⁸⁹ Araripe, *A glória de um pioneiro*, 35-36.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁹¹ Menezes, *Itinerário de Delmiro Gouveia*, 79-81.

that had served the *povo*.”²⁹² Many accounts provide an incredibly vague idea of Gouveia’s arrest after the fire, shifting immediately to his need to leave Pernambuco for Alagoas to avoid imprisonment. Some claim that his arrest was related to the fire at Derby, and that he was regarded by the authorities as being responsible for the fire.²⁹³ Some authors claim that Gouveia presented a threat to the political and economic elite in Pernambuco, and thus, they created a scandal to defame Gouveia. After his release from prison, Gouveia left Recife for Europe, where he stayed for a year.

The fire, however, was not the only scandal in Gouveia’s life story. According to Rocha, in 1902, the police surrounded Gouveia’s house, the Engenho Beltrão, to recover a minor who Gouveia had kidnapped and brought to live with him. Gouveia was married at the time, but his wife was not living in Recife, and he supposedly fell in love with “a young girl of rare beauty who was not protected by good maternal customs.”²⁹⁴ What is interesting about this story is that it reveals the most controversial fact of Gouveia’s life: his sexual life and tendency to seduce (perhaps to rape) young women. To avoid imprisonment, Gouveia fled to the neighboring state of Alagoas and it is at this point that he started to formulate the idea of Pedra, the factory town on the banks of the São Francisco River.

²⁹² Araripe, *A glória de um pioneiro*, 42.

²⁹³ Ibid., 42-43. Delmiro Gouveia’s arrest supposedly caused popular protest and the markets all shut down until his release.

²⁹⁴ Rocha, *Delmiro Gouveia*, 55-56.

Pedra: The Model Modern Society

“Pedra” tem a melhor luz elétrica do Brasil.²⁹⁵

As Araripe described, “fugindo de Pernambuco, sob pressão, a fim de escapar perseguição, Delmiro Gouveia escolheu Pedra para base das operações comerciais que pretendia reencetar. Mais uma vez iria começar de novo.”²⁹⁶ This stage in Gouveia’s life is the focus of most of the biographies and the point of departure for a few of the studies. Most of the biographies focus on how Delmiro Gouveia turned a backwards, isolated place in the Northeast into what they saw as being the most modern factory town in all of South America. Gouveia started a textile mill, Estrela, on the banks of the São Francisco River, installing a hydroelectric dam to run the machines and to electrify the town. Gouveia supposedly turned the “horrid” topography of the sertão and the “barbaric” sertanejo into modern civilization. Estrela exported its textiles throughout Brazil, to Argentina and Chile, although the brand name for foreign exports was “Barril.”²⁹⁷

A particularly poignant example of how the concept of the modern was interpreted in the Northeast in the 1950s and 1960s can be found in the depictions of how Delmiro Gouveia transformed the sertão and sertanejo into being an ideal modern society with modern citizens. The introduction of industry alone was not

²⁹⁵ A quote by Mauro Mota, cited in Lima Júnior, *Delmiro Gouveia: O Mauá*, 196.

²⁹⁶ Araripe, *A glória de um pioneiro*, 50.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 61.

enough to create modern society; Gouveia had to enforce modern rules and provide modern benefits to educate the workers and their families and turn them into modern citizens. I describe here the town and infrastructure, then the rules, benefits and punishments that Delmiro Gouveia instated for his citizens. Even though the accounts were from the early 1900s, the emphasis on Delmiro Gouveia's role in this transformation, as a man and as a good boss, illustrate that the modern society had to be led and imposed by "exceptional" men, not by the people themselves. But, Northeastern patriarchal modernity also directly challenged the divisions in cultures that Delmiro Gouveia found at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. With education and modern industry, the interpretation of Gouveia's "triumph" in Pedra proved that the Dahomeyans of the Midway Plaisance (or the sertanejos of the Nordeste) could in fact turn into the modern civilization on display in the White City. Thus, the depictions of Gouveia's factory town help to show the overlaps between ideas of nineteenth-century scientific racism and modernization theory in the 1950s and 1960s.²⁹⁸

Delmiro Gouveia supposedly built new houses, all painted white and supposedly impeccably clean, in the town of Pedra for his workers. Inspired by a trip to Italy, he built Romanesque columns in front of the houses, lining the main streets. Pedra supposedly had the most advanced electric system in Brazil, the town had running water that passed through a filtration system, and boasted telephone and

²⁹⁸ The "racial improvement" promoted by Gouveia follows Nancy Stepan's argument about the transformation of eugenics in Latin America. Nancy Leys Stepan *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

telegraph systems, and even an ice cream store and an ice factory.²⁹⁹ He instated leisure activities such as a town band, free sessions for the cinema, soccer games and “exercícios de patinação. Other symbols of modern civilization included eight schools, medical facilities, public parks, a pharmacy, a carrousel and a cinema.³⁰⁰ The textile industry required new infrastructure as well, and Gouveia had roads built and brought “the first cars” to the sertão.³⁰¹

Gouveia, as a “good” and “modern” boss, adhered to an eight-hour workday, and on Sunday, the factory closed. He required everyone in the town to wear shoes, and the workers were required to use a uniform, “azulão,” that Gouveia himself even wore so that no one felt “humiliated or diminished.”³⁰² He was described as having a “patriarchal and educational mission,” requiring all people in the town, regardless of age, to attend classes for literacy and training.³⁰³ According to many of the biographies, everyone in Pedra learned the national anthem, and Delmiro Gouveia led the town under the motto of “order” and “progress.” He named the streets after famous Brazilian and Northeastern figure and dates, such as “José de Alencar,” “Rui Barbosa,” and “13 de Maio.”³⁰⁴

²⁹⁹ Cited from Mauro Mota, Lima Júnior, *Delmiro Gouveia: O Mauá*, 196. The ice factory as a symbol of modernization brings to mind Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.

³⁰⁰ Rocha, *Delmiro Gouveia*, 98.

³⁰¹ Araripe, *A glória de um pioneiro*, 64-65.

³⁰² Lima Júnior, *Delmiro Gouveia: O Mauá*, 201.

³⁰³ Martins, *Delmiro Gouveia: pioneiro e nacionalista*, 107-109. The educational system was supposedly based on Delmiro Gouveia’s observations of São Paulo’s Normal School. Children who did well in class were rewarded with diversion: cinema and carrousel.

³⁰⁴ Lima Júnior, *Delmiro Gouveia: O Mauá*, 197.

But to live and work in Pedra meant that workers had to follow Gouveia's rules: no police, no soldiers. The description of these rules in the biographies defines what was seen as "non-modern" and "modern." Townspeople were forbidden to spit on the street, to drink, to gamble, and prostitution was illegal.³⁰⁵ He required everyone to take a bath daily, to comb their hair and to wear shoes.³⁰⁶ He inspected houses for their hygiene and prohibited domestic abuse. A few stories that appear repeatedly throughout the accounts describe Gouveia's regulation and education. For instance, one day he was bringing a visitor through town and saw a man leaving his house through the window instead of through the door, which was prohibited, and the man was scolded in public. Another story is that of a "new arrival" to the town who constructed a shack outside of Pedra. When Gouveia found the shack, he invited the man and his family either to become employees of the factory and move into town, or to leave the area. The shack was destroyed, since it did not fit into the "modern" Pedra.³⁰⁷

But the most commonly repeated story about Pedra in the biographies was how Gouveia promoted weddings and the establishment of nuclear families in Pedra. As Olympio de Menezes explained, "Na sua cidade proletária, todas as noivas

³⁰⁵ According to Magalhães, those who spit or threw a banana peel on the ground received a fine of 500 – 2.000 reis. Martins, *Delmiro Gouveia: pioneiro e nacionalista*, 146.

³⁰⁶ Martins, *Delmiro Gouveia: pioneiro e nacionalista*, 110.

³⁰⁷ This story is also in the opening sequence of the film, *Coronel Delmiro Gouveia*, in the close-up shot of an old "ex-worker" who explains to the camera, "Quando chegava um retirante de fora, nu, ele mandava vestir. Mandava lá pra loja dele e vestia todo mundo. Se estava com fome, dava de comer. E no outro dia já ia trabalhar."

operárias eram vestidas de seu bolso, do sapato ao véu.”³⁰⁸ Almost every account of Delmiro Gouveia discussed the fact that he promoted weddings by paying for bride’s expenses in a formal ceremony. Modernity meant marriage in the Church. But what is also curious about Gouveia’s desire to promote marriages is that one of the controversies over his death also suggests that he was murdered because of his illicit affair with one of these young brides.

A Nordeste Death for the Modern Man

*“Antes que o capitalismo internacional o liquidasse, o cangaceirismo nacional o sacrificou, sobretudo por questões de terra e prestígio.”*³⁰⁹

*A triste realidade é que as balas homicidas, deflagradas contra Delmiro Gouveia, não interromperam, apenas, o curso da vida de um extraordinário pioneiro. Também retardaram, de uns quarenta anos, a marcha do progresso em terras do Nordeste.*³¹⁰

The story seems to repeat itself in Northeastern Brazil. Any chance for change or the capacity to overturn traditional power structures seems to be preordained to meet with a violent ending. In the case of Delmiro Gouveia, this narrative is even more striking as Gouveia was portrayed as the “exception” to the norm in Northeastern Brazil. And yet, the classic regional narrative still informs his life story. According to his biographers, he was a man who pushed for change and succeeded in creating a new type of Nordeste who was then killed by dominant forces in the Northeast and the entire community and project for modernity dissipated without him. The great

³⁰⁸ Menezes, *Itinerário de Delmiro Gouveia*, 142.

³⁰⁹ Quoted from Thadeu Rocha, friend of Delmiro Gouveia, cited in Lima Júnior, *Delmiro Gouveia: O Mauá*, 225.

³¹⁰ Martins, *Delmiro Gouveia: pioneiro e nacionalista*, 117.

“industrial coronel” was “barbarically” assassinated.³¹¹ While all of the biographies published in the 1950s and 1960s address Gouveia’s death, films, novels and scholarly investigations published from the late 1970s and early 1980s focus almost entirely on the circumstances of Gouveia’s death.

One version of the death of Delmiro Gouveia blames the murder on three cangaceiros, two of whom served a life sentence for their role in the shooting (José Inácio Pia “Jacaré”, Róseia Morais and Antônio Félix). But, even though the men served life sentences, their responsibility has always been disputed. For instance, a 1984 study, *Eu não matei Delmiro Gouveia (Maior erro judiciário do Brasil)*, claimed that Róseo was forced to admit his guilt under torture and threats, and then held in prison without being allowed visitors other than his wife to keep the story hidden.³¹² Some accounts claim that large landowners, or competing coronéis, had sent the cangaceiros to kill Delmiro Gouveia: José Rodrigues de Lima who was protected because he was a state deputy and José Gomes de Sá, who fled to Ceará.³¹³ As Magalhães described, the cangaceiros were simply “pobre vítimas de um meio social atrasado” who were hired to kill Delmiro Gouveia.³¹⁴ The coronéis who hired the men were threatened by his “strong Nordeste audacity and initiative and dreams of the greatness and economic independence of his homeland.”³¹⁵ A related narrative of the death told of how Delmiro Gouveia had raped a young bride on the way to

³¹¹ Lima Júnior, *Delmiro Gouveia: O Mauá*, 220.

³¹² Jorge Oliveira, *Eu não matei Delmiro Gouveia (Maior erro judiciário do Brasil)* (Macéio: Sergasa, 1984).

³¹³ Martins, *Delmiro Gouveia: pioneiro e nacionalista*, 117.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Recife to buy her wedding gown, and this provoked the husband and groom to defend their honor and kill Delmiro Gouveia.

Another major narrative, as Magalhães quoted from IBGE's *Enciclopédia dos Municípios Brasileiros*, was that Delmiro Gouveia “morreu bárbaramente assassinado, vítima de interesses de trustes estrangeiros.”³¹⁶ According to this account, the British company Machine Cotton had done everything in their power to destabilize and destroy Delmiro Gouveia's textile company. In the film, *Coronel Delmiro Gouveia*, the representative of Machine Cotton, Mr. Hallam, threatens Delmiro Gouveia telling him that he cannot fight against the “invincible Machine Company.”³¹⁷ Machine Cotton had tried multiple times to purchase the textile company to which Delmiro Gouveia had responded, “No, I am Brazilian.”³¹⁸ The threats to destabilize Gouveia's factory merely pushed Gouveia to expand his exports, even to British colonies, which supposedly only increased their hatred of Gouveia.³¹⁹ As Mauro Mota claimed, “Even today, nobody knows who sent the men to kill Delmiro Gouveia but everyone suspects it fell in the hands of the British imperialists.”³²⁰ In the *Ligas Camponesas* newspaper review of a biography of Delmiro Gouveia, the role of Machine Cotton was emphasized with the added

³¹⁶ Ibid., 193.

³¹⁷ Geraldo Sarno e Orlando Senna, *Coronel Delmiro Gouveia (script)* (Rio de Janeiro: Editor CODECRI, 1979), 122.

³¹⁸ Lima Júnior, *Delmiro Gouveia: O Mauá*, 272.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Mota, *Quem foi Delmiro Gouveia?* 55-56.

qualifier that after the Revolução de 30, the British influence was eliminated and substituted by imperialist forces from North America.³²¹

The circumstances of the death and the state's failure to fully investigate also raised the idea that the state and political officials were in some way involved in the murder. Felix Lima Júnior compared the circumstance of the murder and the escape of the cangaceiros to Abraham Lincoln's assassination and the mysterious escape of Booth from the Ford Theater.³²² Supposedly, Delmiro's three dogs did not make a sound when the cangaceiros approached. And, according to Lima Júnior, a *preta velha* explained their silence, recalling that the dogs had spent the entire day yowling to the point that Delmiro Gouveia had asked what the dogs could foresee.³²³ By raising folklore and perhaps "black magic," this account of Delmiro Gouveia's death again shows how the life of the modern Delmiro was doomed by the traditional society of the Northeast. Gouveia's death was preordained by "greater" forces that prevent modernity, order and progress from changing the sertão.

After Delmiro Gouveia's death on 10 October 1917, supposedly foreign business interests supposedly took immediate action in attempting to close down Estrela, the modern factory in the sertão. Most accounts refer to acts of dumping, fraud, spying, and any other illegitimate business practice to describe how Machine Cotton eventually took control of Estrela. As Lima Júnior described, Machine Cotton started selling its textiles at a price lower than market value in order to establish itself as a monopoly. "Era o brado de alerta da consciencia nacional, que não encontrou

³²¹ Wânia Filizola, "Delmiro Gouveia: Pioneiro e Nacionalista," *LIGA* 14 August 1963, 5.

³²² Lima Júnior, *Delmiro Gouveia: O Mauá*, 213.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 214.

eco no governo da República. Nenhuma medida foi tomada, infelizmente, e anos depois, a Machine conseguiu liquidar a nossa fábrica de linha para vergonha do governo e opróbrio do povo brasileiro.”³²⁴ In April 1930, a manager of Machine Cotton came to Pedra to examine the machines. Some were transferred to the South and the rest of the factory was ordered to be disassembled and thrown into the São Francisco River. This “imperialist take-over,” is a frequently repeated narrative in the stories of Delmiro Gouveia; for instance, the PCB newspaper of Pernambuco focused on this issue in their homage paid to Delmiro Gouveia: “Homenageando Delmiro Gouveia, queremos recordar ao povo nordestino, o crime cometido pelos homens do capital ingles, contra uma das nossas indústrias que se tivesse continuado, a fisionomia da nossa indústria nos sertões do nordeste seria muito diferente.”³²⁵

And the story of what happened to Pedra and Delmiro Gouveia’s memory? Pedra was renamed as “Delmiro Gouveia” in 1952. Most accounts describe it as a place where civilization had touched the sertão, and by the mid 1950s, with the construction of the Paulo Afonso dam, the area was once again able to experience the “progress” and “order” of modernity. Although Delmiro Gouveia’s story is quite different from the histories of Canudos or Lampião, a similar type of regional narrative informs Gouveia’s trajectory: short-lived struggles are repressed or demolished, ending the possibility for change. This narrative also involves the idea of “forgetting,” or a victimization narrative that can be mobilized to make claims of

³²⁴ Ibid., 275-276.

³²⁵ “Centenário do pioneiro Delmiro Gouveia,” *A Hora*, 8 – 14 June 1963, 3.

injustices, whether they are warranted or not.³²⁶ But, as in many of the regional narratives, Delmiro Gouveia's story supposedly had disappeared, as Felix Lima Júnior claimed, "in this country of ungrateful people, Delmiro Gouveia is yet another victim of the conspiracy of silence."³²⁷ According to one of Delmiro Gouveia's daughters, her father was "Perseguido, em vida, pelo truste internacional, meu pai continua, depois de morto, perseguido pelo truste nacional de silêncio."³²⁸

And, as Telma de Barros Correia explained in her study on representations of Delmiro Gouveia, the message of the film, *Coronel Delmiro Gouveia* places the blame for modern industry not surviving in Pedra on Delmiro Gouveia paternalistic order, and on English imperialism. The final scene shows one of the most typical actors who interprets the "Nordestino," José Dumont, destroying the textile factory and throwing it into the waterfall as the voice-over explains,

"Foi isso que aconteceu. Seu Delmiro mandou a gente fazer a fábrica, a gente fez. Os ingleses veio e mandou quebrar as máquinas e derrubar no rio. A gente quebrou e derrubou. Eram os donos, os patrão. Os patrão manda e os trabalhador obedece. Ninguém perguntou pra nós o nosso pensamento, se a gente queria ou não quebrar as máquinas. Agora, o povo daqui nunca esqueceu o Coronel Delmiro. A fraqueza do Coronel é que ele era só, sozinho mesmo, e aí atriraram nele e mataram a fábrica. Tenho pra mim que ele foi como um exemplo pra nós tudo. Mas penso também que o dia em que o povo fizer a fábrica pra ele mesmo aí num tem força no mundo qui pode quebrar nem derrubar, porque num tem força-maior que a do povo trabalhador, que trabalha, como as máquinas, e pensa, que nem gente."³²⁹

³²⁶ For instance, Severino Calvacanti's claim of the injustices faced by Northeastern politicians when he was forced to retire after a scandal. (see chapter two)

³²⁷ Lima Júnior, *Delmiro Gouveia: O Mauá*, 293.

³²⁸ Statement by Maria Gouveia in 1955, cited in *Ibid.*, 293.

³²⁹ Sarno, *Coronel Delmiro Gouveia*, 126.

Cultural Representations of Evolution or Revolution

The theme of evolution or revolution appeared in public policies, social movements and development projects as well as in the cultural sphere in the early 1960s.

Cultural debates reflected key issues of authenticity and debates within Brazil over the revolutionary potential of the Northeast. Theater productions and films expressed the poverty of Northeastern Brazil and offered interpretations of this poverty as revolutionary or evolutionary. While the films and plays were about the rural Northeast, few of them actually approached the topic of the contemporary political scene and the rural social movements, choosing instead to represent the Northeast in terms of historical symbols or themes such as slavery, drought, cangaceiros, and religious fanatics. This section of the chapter analyzes the plays and films about contemporary rural social movements, rural politics or rural revolution in the early 1960s.

The MCP, (Movimento de Cultura Popular), was the best known of the revolutionary theater groups that hoped to *conscientizar* the poor in the Northeast of their revolutionary situation through theater productions. In the early 1960s, the MCP produced the plays, *Revolução na América do Sul*, *Testamento de cangaceiro*, *Julgamento em Novo Sol*, *Volta do Camaleão Alface*, and *A derradeira ceia*. Most of the theater productions used the Theater Santa Isabel or the Arraial, labeled the “headquarters” of the MCP.³³⁰ And, even though the MCP was a radical theater group, the plays on stage in Recife were mostly performed in front of an urban and

³³⁰ “Movimento cultural do Nordeste propõe se a iniciar uma nova era no teatro em toda a região,” *Diário de Pernambuco* 24 April 1963, 3.

middle class audience. By examining the reviews of the MCP theater production, *Julgamento em Novo Sol*, Hermilo Borbilha Filho's *João Farrapo*, and the Paulista Teatro de Arena production *Revolução em América do Sul*, in revolutionary and mainstream newspapers, it is possible to locate how the issue of evolution or revolution played out in the cultural sphere.

A number of theater productions started in Recife in the 1960s, some sponsored by the Movimento de Cultura Popular (MCP) and the Teatro de Cultura Popular (TCP) with the intention of using revolutionary theater to raise the consciousness of the population, addressing topics about agrarian reform and poverty. In March of 1963, the *Ligas Camponesas* newspaper reviewed the theater production, *Julgamento em Novo Sol*,³³¹ performed by the MCP in the Teatro do Arraial Velho and part of the radical street theater productions associated with Augusto Boal.³³² Although *Julgamento* was based on the interior of the state of São Paulo, the article commented on how it raised issues pertaining to rural life throughout Brazil. The play focused on a struggle between 3,000 rural workers against the large landowner (coronel) who wants to expel them from his lands so he can grow more grass to feed his cattle. As quoted in the review, the coronel claims that “minha intenção sempre foi uma só: enriquecer esta região. Ela não pode ficar nas mãos do lavradores. Ignorantes (...) eu digo que os frigoríficos estrangeiros estão se interessando pelos meus rebanhos. Estão procurando ajudar o progresso do país.

³³¹ Nelson Xavier, Augusto Boal, Hamilton Trevisan, Modesto Carene, and Benedito Araújo, *Julgamento em Novo Sol*.

³³² “Arte Para o Povo: MCP traz para o palco drama do camponês,” *LIGA* 6 March 1963, 5.

Mais divisas. E eu me vejo de mãos atadas pela burrica deste povo.”³³³ This political justification and narrative was heard commonly throughout Brazil during this period, and the point of the play, according to the review, was to educate the people about how to respond to such a statement from the powerful landowner. The point of the play was to “create courage to fight against injustices through the action demonstrated in the play.”³³⁴

The Communist Party *Jornal do Bancário* reviewed *Julgamento em Novo Sol* as being “pioneering” and “revolutionary” in terms of bringing theater productions to the *povo*, “dentro da mais moderna técnica teatral.” In a photo of one of the scenes in which peasants are sitting on the floor involved in a conversation, the caption explains: “A autenticidade do vestuário é incontestável.”³³⁵ The point of the play according to this review is to show the defenses of the peasants who confront the real Brazilian agrarian problem along with the “falso humanismo” of some of the large landowners. The Communist Party reviewer highlights the role of the Church in upholding the landowning system, quoting from the play that the landowners never forget to build a Church on their property where the starving rural workers can go to thank God for their misery and the “bondade” do patrão, but that the landowners never remember to pay their workers a decent salary. The only criticism was in the selection of the actor who played the lead peasant who was excellent but whose “tipo atlético não é do camponês brasileiro.”

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ “Julgamento em novo sol,” *Jornal do Bancário* 2nd Quinzena de Maio, 1962, 5.

The review of *Julgamento em novo sol* in the *Diario de Pernambuco* claimed that the play was terrible as a play and as a spectacle.³³⁶ The reviewer said that the play “Lembrou-nos uma tentativa bisonha daquilo que Erwin Piscator descreve como tendo sido o Teatro Politico que se fez na Alemanha, entre o fim da guerra de 1918 e o advento do nazismo, no livro do mesmo nome.”³³⁷ According to this review, the play was a “farsa de extremo primarismo” that made it impossible to feel solidarity with the rural workers in their conflict with the landowner, because of the idea that violence was the only solution. The reviewer claimed that artistic autonomy of the play was non-existent; that the playwrights had used theater as a means of distributing ideological propaganda. The reviewer claimed that with the exception of a few of the actors who had some talent, many had simply been cast because “seus proprios tipos fisicos foram usados para caracterizar as figures que interpretavam e assim facilmente pareciam autenticas.”³³⁸

In a separate article on theater groups in the Northeast in the *Diario de Pernambuco*, the author criticizes the MCP for being purely political propaganda and nothing artistic. Supposedly in 1963, another theater group began in the Northeast, the Movimento Cultural do Nordeste, with the intention of creating a circuit of theater productions in all the major cities in the Northeast as well as in the towns in the interior. But, instead of being “political” plays, these were to be artistic productions, drawing inspiration from classic (Greek and Roman) theater, with the objective of

³³⁶ “ ‘Julgamento em novo sol’ visto pelo crítico Henrique Oscar: Ruim como peça e como espetáculo,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 11 April 1963, 2 (second section).

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Ibid.

“educating” the *povo*.³³⁹ The author claimed that people, rich or poor, attended films, circuses, and plays for the delight of the spectacle, claiming that the reason why the MCP plays were supposedly poorly attended was that these plays were political but lacked the artistic diversion one desires from a play.³⁴⁰ Thus, the Movimento Cultural do Nordeste, would bring the great theater productions, chanchadas and artistic pleasure back to the stage. Meira Pires’s *João Farrapo*, produced with the support of the Rio Grande do Norte state government and Governor Aloisio Alves,³⁴¹ provided a different view of revolution in the Northeast.

According to the director, the objective of the play was that it had no political affiliation or foreign influence. As Meira Pires claimed about the objective of the play, “Eu quis que o heroi, depois de assistir e sentir, impassivel, tanta miseria, terminasse por concordar com o povo daquele lugarejo perdido e a ele aderisse misturando-se à sua fé e a divindade, como unico recurso capaz de solucionar os graves problemas da nossa sofrida região, já que ‘os homens de lá’ continuam insensíveis aos reclamos e anseios dos sertanejos necessitados e famintos.”³⁴² Instead of joining the revolution, João Farrapo who represents the common alienated man of the Northeast, chooses to pray. According to Meira Pires, “o povo está cansado de ser ludibriado e prefere, por isso mesmo, apelar para Deus porque seu grito de angustia, de desespero e de dor não alcança os nossos dirigentes preocupados que vivem com o

³³⁹ “Movimento cultural do Nordeste propõe-se a iniciar uma nova era no teatro em toda a região,” *Diário de Pernambuco* 24 April 1963, 3.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Governor Aloisio Alves was a controversial figure in Northeastern politics during the early 1960s, in that he cooperated fully with the U.S. government and U.S. AID, and claimed not to be socialist and not to support the politics of Miguel Arraes.

³⁴² “Teatrologia Meira Pires define posição da peça ‘João Farrapo’” *Diário de Pernambuco* 13 September 1963, 3 (2nd caderno).

fomento sempre crescente do martirio para, por meio dele, conseguir a consecução dos seus inconfessáveis objetivos.”³⁴³

The reviewer was extremely happy with the view portrayed in the play because according to the reviewer the underdevelopment in the Northeast has created an alienated population, not a revolutionary population. According to the reviewer, the people in the Northeast, similar to the people in the play, do not believe in or desire armed revolution as a solution. And, as the reviewer states, it is better for the *povo* to pray “para enganar a fome” than to pick up arms to destroy their own brothers.³⁴⁴ The review in the *Diario de Pernambuco* ends in a peculiar way: the reviewer states the play may seem to serve the political right, anti-nationalist, and imperialist but what is going on in the area where the play takes place is that the guerrilhas are taking the prayer books out of the hands of the people, replacing the books with Che Guevara’s guerrilha manual. In other words, the play presented the reality but Leftist social movements and agitators continually threatened this “reality” in their attempt to seduce the rural population to start a violent revolution.

The focus of most of the reviews of Augusto Boal’s play, *Revolução em America do Sul*, performed by the São Paulo Teatro de Arena, was on the censorship supposedly imposed by the State of Pernambuco. The play opened in Recife in late October 1961, and according to *A Hora*, the Censura da Secretária de Segurança Pública, requested that certain parts of the play were removed and then tried to

³⁴³ “Teatrologó Meira Pires define posição da peça ‘João Farrapo’” *Diario de Pernambuco* 13 September 1963, 3 (2nd caderno).

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

“impede the performance of the second part of the play.”³⁴⁵ For instance, in one part of the play where the actors were supposed to shout “Revolução! Revolução! Revolução!” the word had to be changed to “Movimento!”³⁴⁶ During the performance, in the part that was supposed to be censored, the audience shouted, “Abaixo a censura fascista.” But, in a review of the play in the *Ligas Camponesas* newspaper, the reviewer claimed the play was “bourgeois.”³⁴⁷ A union leader supposedly criticized the production because the actors made no attempt to participate with the audience,³⁴⁸ and the portrayal of the worker was dehumanizing. As quoted,

³⁴⁵ “Censura Fascista interdita peça teatral” *A Hora*, 28 October – 4 November 1961, 7. The censorship was also raised in the *Diário de Pernambuco*.

³⁴⁶ Joacir Castro, “Movimento, movimento, movimento,” *A Hora* 4 -10 November 1961, 3. Castro compared the censorship of the play to the “conservative, homens do Golpe” (specifically, Olímpio Mendonça) who were responsible for invading the Sindicato dos Bancários (headquarters of the underground Brazilian Communist Party in Recife), the União dos Estudantes de Pernambuco and also the forces responsible for wanting to expel the camponesas from the município de Cabo.

³⁴⁷ A review from the *Ligas Camponesas* similarly criticized one of the major Cinema Novo films released around the same period, Nelson Pereira dos Santos’s *Vidas Secas*. The film strove to portray the “reality” of the rural Nordeste, including what was considered passivity and non-revolutionary action. While the mainstream media reviewed the film in a positive light, the *Ligas Camponesas* newspaper criticized the film. The review in *Liga* claimed that *Vidas Secas* portrayed flat characters, without contextualizing the problems of the life of the rural Nordeste and without showing the complexities of internal and external struggles facing the man of the sertão. The reviewer claimed this portrayed Fabiano and sinha Vitória as “animal-like” and non-intelligent, which the reviewer blames on Nelson Pereira dos Santos’s unfamiliarity with the people and life of the sertão. “Why would he want to express that the caboclo didn’t communicate? What did he wish to show with the lack of symptoms (dreams that crossed between the couple? If this was it, and not a mere interpretation, an interpretation completely wrote of the homem do sertao, and principally in the relationship between Fabiano and sinha Vitoria, in which a verbal understanding doesn’t exist, for a lack of vocabulary but there is still an effective and even intellectual understanding between them.”

³⁴⁸ In another *LIGA* article on Brechtian theater, an observer of the Berliner Ensemble noted the revolutionary style of East German theater, specifically discussing the interaction between actors, the director and the audience. “Arte para o povo: O teatro de Brecht,” *LIGA* 28 August 1963, 5.

“*Revolução na América do Sul* mostra o operário como se fosse um marginal, isto não é absolutamente verdade na sociedade brasileira.”³⁴⁹

The theme of the “marginality” of rural workers was a topic addressed in a number of films about Northeastern Brazil in the early 1960s. As cultural critic Jean-Claude Bernardet claimed, many of the films made in the early 1960s wanted to show the disease of Brazilian society: “o povo é explorado, não tem condições mínimas de vida; se o país evolui, o povo não toma conhecimento dessa evolução.”³⁵⁰ Most of the directors chose to denounce what they labeled as the bourgeois national beliefs; for instance, the idea that “cangaceiros” were a product of glandular problems or that illiterate people should not have the right to vote.³⁵¹ But, at the same time, filmmakers chose to employ certain representations of the regional stereotypes of poverty and passivity of the rural population. In this section, I analyze two films that exemplify the debate over evolution or revolution: the ABC production, Helen Jean Rogers’s *Brazil: The Troubled Land* (1961), and Olney São Paulo’s *Grito da terra* (1964).³⁵²

These films dealt with the issue of the contemporary political situation in the rural

³⁴⁹ “Arte Para o Povo,” *LIGA* 20 March 1963, 5.

³⁵⁰ Jean-Claude Bernardet, *Brasil em tempo de cinema: Ensaio sobre o cinema brasileiro de 1958 a 1966* (Rio: Civilização Brasileira, 1967), 45.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

³⁵² Three other films produced in the early 1960s fit this category loosely although two have a more urban focus. One particular scene in Anselmo Duarte’s *Pagador de Promessas* (1962) suggests that the Brazilian media turned unconscious peasants of this era into political activists fighting for agrarian reform. The film is further analyzed in a later chapter. Leon Hirszman’s *Maioria Absoluta* (1964), a documentary on the rural Northeast, examined the issue of illiterates having the right to vote. Although Hirszman interviewed Northeastern peasants about their living conditions and their political interests, the film has a more “urban” focus, criticizing the “bourgeois” attitude that illiterates do not and should not have an ability to vote. And, Eduardo Coutinho’s *Cabra marcado para morrer* (1983) would have been an ideal film if the film had been completed and produced in the 1960s. It is also analyzed in the final chapter.

Northeast, although neither reached a broad Brazilian audience, unlike the films that portrayed the Northeast in terms of more familiar historical symbols.

The film, *Brazil: The Troubled Land*, broadcast in the United States on ABC television, portrays the threat of revolution as linked to poverty and underdevelopment.³⁵³ The film starts with Francisco Julião talking about the struggles of the peasants in Latin America but quickly shifts to the modern, urban cityscape of Recife and specifically the beach area of Boa Viagem, showing skyscrapers, stores, and cars. Then, the viewer is introduced to “Severino,” described as a 49-year-old peasant who cuts sugar cane and is illiterate. The camera follows Severino, barefoot and in shabby clothing, through the streets of Recife as he looks in at stores selling televisions and other modern equipment, ending at the headquarters of the Ligas Camponesas, described as the “Communist Front headquarters.” He stands in line to meet with Francisco Julião who sits at a table under Abelardo da Hora murals of Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and Francisco Julião.

The next scene shifts to the countryside, cane fields and a “typical” rural house, where Severino’s wife, “Dona Julia,” makes dinner (manioc) for their six children and the voice-over declares, “Such is their world, a world with only one toy. What good is schooling in their world?” The narrator claims that the children have never tasted milk and that life has been this way since the days of slavery. To exemplify the unequal power relations, the film cuts to a large landowner, described as “Severino’s master, Constâncio Maranhão.” The images depict a large house with

³⁵³ I want to thank the librarians at Northern Illinois University who went out of their way to make it possible for me to see the only available copy of this 16 mm film through Interlibrary Loan Services. Helen Jean Rogers, *Brazil: The Troubled Land*, (Carlsbad, CA: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1961).

a pool and Maranhão shows off his new 38-caliber gun to the camera crew, saying that it is the “best gun made in the United States.” He laughs and shoots the gun in the air, and says, “My peasants are just lazy. If anyone comes here and tries to organize, I’ll kill him.” In reviews of the film, this scene was interpreted as demonstrating the backwardness, violence and feudal nature of the rural landowning elite, emphasized in a number of U.S. newspaper and magazine articles at the time depicting similar spectacles of power and apathy for rural workers. While this attitude undoubtedly existed and continues to exist, the scene with Maranhão is interesting because it seems that Maranhão is in fact strutting his modern American-ness like a peacock to the camera, trying to show them just how modern and “American” he is in his choice of weapon and his Wild West or cowboy-esque mannerisms.

So, with the scene of feudalism set in the audiences’ minds, the film turns to presenting the case of revolution. The scenes show *violeiros*, or *troubadors*, people who travel through the countryside singing *literatura de cordel*. The documentary announces that they now sing about Julião and the need to raise rural wages and start a revolution like in Cuba or Patrice Lumumba’s Congo. The film shows scenes of rural workers rallies, and peasants talking about the need to stop working for the landowner who brings the worker only misery. And, the voice-over ominously predicts: “The shadows lengthen over the troubled land.”

Celso Furtado was interviewed about his views on the *Ligas Camponesas* and he stated that he was not worried and that Julião was not an important political figure. Furtado claims that the problem of the Northeast is a “Brazilian problem” that must be solved by Brazilians. Based on the studies of SUDENE and US AID, Furtado’s

argument seems valid but in the film, it is presented as an argument related to the fact that government officials in Brazil were not “modern” enough to confront the real threat of communism. Furtado’s understatement of Julião’s power was quickly pulled into question by the scenes that followed Furtado’s interview that emphasized the power of Julião. The film cuts to images of Julião leading rural workers’ rallies, and describes him as “ambitious, fighting and able to ride to power on the backs of peasants to be President of Brazil.” He seems popular among the crowds of rural workers, embraced warmly and having flower petals thrown over his head. In a rally, Julião states that the hoe is the symbol of backwardness and misery, contrasting with the large landowners who live in the cities and enjoy modern comforts. “If the peasant cannot win in peace, it will have to be revolution!” The voice-over explains that the Ligas Camponesas’s enemy is American capitalism, while the heroes are Fidel Castro and Mao Tse Tung.

The final cut takes the audience back to “Severino” and as he walks along a dirt road lined by sugar cane, the voice-over explains,

“They cannot prosper.

Life is hard.

There are more opportunities in São Paulo and Rio.

If only there were someone to help?

Give us land...fertile land....

(Pause)

As if they were not the product of 3,000 years of Western progress.

There is much talk of freedom and democracy but not much to understand in a world of hunger....of misery....”

The film is remarkable in its depiction of the “land of contrasts”: the modern urban areas and the Wild West feudalism of the rural areas and it is also an impressive historical document showing live footage of Francisco Julião and the Ligas

Camponesas. The character of “Severino” is peculiar because it is unclear if he is actually a peasant or if he is an actor interpreting a peasant, since most of the scenes with “Severino” were obviously staged. The message is that of modernization theorists: modernity exists in Brazil and even in Northeastern Brazil, but most of the region’s people still have no access to this modernity even though they find it appealing. Northeastern Brazil appears to be in a precarious position, where its poverty and feudalism could easily turn to “communist” revolution if (the United States) does not step in and help bring modernity, freedom and democracy to the region.

Olney São Paulo’s *Grito da terra* portrays a different perspective on the issue of revolution versus evolution. In contrast to *Brazil: The Troubled Land*, *Grito da Terra* was produced at the cusp of the military coup (the first scenes were shot early December, 1963) and the film never was well distributed in Brazil or abroad, even with editing and promotional support from Nelson Pereira dos Santos, Vladimir Carvalho and João Ramiro Mello.³⁵⁴ Olney São Paulo’s political views and films led to his arrest and torture in 1968, the consequences of which may have led to his early death at age 41.³⁵⁵ His film style has been compared to the Italian neorealistas such as Vittorio de Sica. Generally speaking, *Grito da terra* was about the need for agrarian reform and violence in the countryside, filmed near São Paulo’s hometown of Feira

³⁵⁴ Angela José, *Olney São Paulo e a peleja do cinema sertanejo* (Rio: Quartet Editora e Comunicação, 1999), 75-78.

³⁵⁵ José Lourzeiro, “Prefácio: O cineasta que virou luz,” Angela José, *Olney São Paulo e a peleja do cinema sertanejo* (Rio: Quartet Editora e Comunicação, 1999), 9-11. Olney São Paulo’s arguably most important film, *Manhã cinzenta* (1969) portrayed the arrest, torture and murder of a student couple by the military, and resulted in Olney São Paulo’s actual arrest.

de Santana, Bahia. as the director of production and actor, Eládio Theotonio de Freitas, claimed, “A história é meio esquerdista, mostrando as lutas dos lavradores com os latifundiários, tema atual e oportuno quando a reforma agrária está na ordem do dia.”³⁵⁶ It was loosely based on Ciro de Carvalho Leite’s novel, *Mulheres de vida fácil*, in that São Paulo wanted to discuss the story of a woman who wanted to leave the sertão because she hated life there. “Uma Madame Bovary subdesenvolvida.”³⁵⁷

As Maria José described, *Grito da terra* was part of the cultural movements of neorealismo and cinema novo. It “unveiled the nordestino tragedy, the social relations, and agrarian reform. The long shots of the film take us to the great empty spaces of the Bahian sertao, the caatinga and the hills. The slow, crawling narrative is directly linked to the notion of time for the sertanejo, whose days and nights pass by sluggishly. The ideas of time and space, formulated from environmental determinism, make clear the way in which the Northeastern man reacts and thinks, in a paused speech, with long gestures and in the way of walking without a rush to arrive anywhere.”³⁵⁸ David Neves, a film critic for *Diário Carioca*, who was critical of cinema novo films and of the Paraíba documentary school films such as *Aruanda*, claimed that the film narrative “left much to desire.”³⁵⁹ Neves claimed that it is a film of the sertão for the sertão, but that Olney São Paulo “ignorava o verdadeiro significado que seu filme poderia ter no panorama cinematográfico nacional

³⁵⁶ From an interview with Eládio Theotonio de Freitas, *A tarde* (Salvador), 14 January 1964, in José, *Olney São Paulo*, 74.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 71.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 195.

³⁵⁹ David Neves, “O sertão Segundo Olney,” *Diário Carioca* 11 December 1964. Folder 05211. *O grito da terra*. MAM Archives. Rio de Janeiro.

queríamos justamente diizer que a precipitação conduziu-o a caminhos erroneous no que respeita, sobretudo, à apresentação do filme nas metrópoles.”³⁶⁰

The characters, as described by Maria José, are not the cangaceiros and fanatics of other films but based on what was seen as the “reality” of the early 1960s.³⁶¹ Loli is a “sensual and dangerous woman” who wishes to leave the sertão for the city (Helena Ignez of *Mandacaru Vermelho*, *A grande feira*, *Menino de engenho*); Maria is a “typical peasant” who believes in the strength of the nordestino to fight against environmental limits (drought) and the power of the latifundio. The romantic counterparts are Geraldo, the brother of Loli and boyfriend of Maria, who is a poor cowhand who also works in the fields and Sebastião, the lover of Loli, the villain who is an aspiring large landowner who wants to own more land and become involved in politics as a coronel, willing to rob and kill for power. Finally, the Afro-Brazilian actor Lídio Silva, who interprets the figure of the messianic Sebastião in Glauber Rocha’s *Deus e o diabo*, plays the part of a rural teacher who sees the need to conscientizar the Nordeste peasants to learn to read, write and understand their rights.

The central theme of the film is to analyze the power relations between the smallholders, the small business owners and the large landowners.³⁶² According to Olney de São Paulo, his goal was to produce a film about the Northeast,

“um filme que fosse um poema onde somente o homem e a terra identificados, existíssem como seus únicos personagens. Um quase documentario, uma cronica rural, ou talvez um depoimento sincero sobre a vida do sertanejo desemparado e explorado que, não obstante

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ José, *Olney São Paulo*, 78.

³⁶² Ibid., 79.

parecer aceitar tudo como se fosse coisa natural, no íntimo não compreende porque lhe foi destinado viver em tamanho miséria. Uma desgraça que se a uns sensibiliza e a outros incomoda, deixa-nos a todos numa tranquila e criminosa indiferença. O filme seria também um grito – um grito contido, é verdade, mas um grito de desespero daquela gente que se arrasta sob a pêssoa do sol e do infortúnio. O nordestino é assim memso: pachorrento, triste; sua vida é um cortejo fúnebre, onde não existem condições para a ambição e a morte é sua única certeza. Dentro desse espírito, tentei realizar uma película em que buscasse também um estilo brasileiro para o filme do nordeste, utilizando para isso de uma linguagem simples, direita, acessiva e não concessiva; uma linguagem de crônica de amor mas que não interessasse somente à pessoa amada. Não seria um filme regionalista, pelo contrário. O drama do Nordeste é universal. Começa no Brasil, na América, continua na Ásia, na África e até na mais civilizada metrópole. É a terrível angústia social que sufoca o homem.”³⁶³

Olney São Paulo, as with many of the cinemanovistas, saw the Northeast as representing larger themes in world politics of exploitation and imperialism.

The film faced censorship, in particular one scene in which Maria made a reference to the “Cavaleiro da Esperança,” otherwise known as Luis Carlos Pretes (PCB). In the scene, Maria says that the teacher has mentioned that the “cavalo branco de luz” will come soon, shedding light and hope on the region. According to one film review, the censorship left the film “mutilated” and almost incomprehensible.³⁶⁴ But most of all, the fact that the film was only ready for release after the coup meant that few theaters wished to show it because it dealt with the controversial theme of agrarian reform and rebellion.³⁶⁵ From 1965 to 1967 the film was shown in Rio, São Paulo, Salvador, Aracaju, and Recife, distributed by Satélite

³⁶³ Ficha da Cinemateca MOMA, 17.7.1967, no. 110; Folder 05211, *O grito da terra*. MAM Archives. Rio de Janeiro.

³⁶⁴ Aruiz Espírito Brabo, “O Grito da Terra,” *Ultima Hora*. Folder 05211, *O grito da terra*. MAM Archives. Rio de Janeiro.

³⁶⁵ José, *Olney São Paulo*, 82.

Filmes. It was shown at the I Festival Internacional do Filme in Rio, and the Festival do Cinema Baiano in Fortaleza. It was also shown at the Noite do Cinema Brasileira, organized by the U.S. embassy in 1965, and was selected for international film festivals but the producer, Ciro de Carvalho, declared that it would only leave Brazil in full, without the cuts made by the censorship board.³⁶⁶ It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to find *Grito da terra* in Brazil today and even in the archival film holdings (MAM-Rio, FUNARTE, Cinemateca Brasileiro), little exists on the film and director.

Jean-Claude Bernardet raises the appropriate question about why more films, and “revolutionary” films, chose not to make films about the rural struggles of the 1950s and 1960s. He suggests that the reason for this absence of films about the Ligas Camponesas has to do with the fact that “in the countryside, the main interest was criticizing the latifundia and denouncing the misery, so the peasant struggles – as an autonomous struggle and popular project – could scare the bourgeois audiences and producers, especially because they were all attracted to the developmentalist projects.”³⁶⁷ He claims that Brazilians who were interested in developmentalism were primarily interested in the rural Northeast because they saw it as a feudal region that needed to be incorporated into the nation, as producers and consumers of a capitalist society. According to Bernardet, the filmmakers had a tacit agreement with the bourgeois – not to approach the theme of the urban working class, industry, urban areas or the urban elite – which is why the Cinema Novo directors chose to

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 83.

³⁶⁷ Jean-Claude Bernardet, *Cineastas e imagens do povo* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2003), 48.

focus on the rural Northeast. But, after the coup, the pact with developmentalism was broken and it became clear that the urban elite were not so anti-imperialist and nationalistic and thus filmmakers shifted to urban, working class themes in their films.³⁶⁸

I appreciate Bernardet's explanation because he raises an excellent question about the absence of films about the Ligas Camponesas, the shift after the coup to films that had a more urban focus, and the issue of the consumption of these films by the urban middle class, which are three issues that deserve greater attention by historians and film scholars. However, the issue of repression and censorship also must be taken into consideration. By the 1970s, the theme of Northeastern poverty in film was one of the few cases in which the military censors completely prohibited one film's distribution, Vladimir Carvalho's *O pais de São Saruê*, domestically and internationally, for seven years. In comparison with *Grito da terra*, the amount of publications and information on *O pais de São Saruê* is impressive: When the film was released in 1979, it became a focus for criticism of the military regime, its censors, and the issue of poverty in the Northeast. The reasons why the government feared these cultural productions differed, but the restrictions on the topic of poverty emphasize a common narrative in Northeastern Brazil that has to do with silencing. But, what is interesting is that claims of "silences" are consistently used in the Northeast to raise issues of victimhood and injustice but at the same time, the government actually prohibited certain issues and censored topics.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 47-48.

Carvalho described his experience with the censors and during the military regime, when he returned to Paraíba in 1966-67: “Sabia que a várzea estava vigiada, que ninguém podia mais falar em Liga Camponesa, quanto mais entrar de camera de filmar e gravador para documentar os despojos do que for a o maior movimento de massa, desde Canudos, Contestado e Caldeirão.”³⁶⁹ But, he selected to make a film about the struggle to survive in the rural Northeast, as Carvalho claimed, “São Saruê é uma tentativa de colocar o povo e sua movimentação, o comportamento de ocupação das terras secas do Nordeste Brasileiro, tomando a Paraíba apenas como uma referencia e uma sùmula, porque a Paraíba, como Pernambuco, como Alagoas, são sùmulas do Nordeste, quer dizer, é o mesmo folklore que se repete, com variações, é o mesmo tipo de exploração da terra, é o mesmo tipo de acontecimentos que registaram a sociedade.”³⁷⁰ *O país de São Saruê* (1971) was released during height of the most repressive era of the dictatorship, also a period in which General Médici attempted to create new national programs under a banner of strong patriotism, or as Carvalho quoted, the mantra of , “Brasil, Ame-o ou deixe-o.”³⁷¹ The black-and-white film portrayed a “suffering image of the impoverished Northeast” that caused it to be censored in this era of strong nationalism. The film was only released from the censorship board in 1979, at the beginning of the abertura.³⁷² The tensions between the Northeast as the heart of the nation, the Northeast as the victim of exploitation and

³⁶⁹ Paulo Melo, “Vladimir, A batalha do cotidiano,” notes from the programa de apresentação de *O País de São Saruê – Brasília – 1981*. Folder: Vladimir Carvalho. Cinemateca Brasileira. São Paulo.

³⁷⁰ Vladimir Carvalho. Interview with José Marinho de Oliveira. Folder D22412, Depoimentos Cinema Brasileiro, tema Nordeste. São Paulo, ECA/USP, s.d. Cinemateca Brasileira. São Paulo. p.22.

³⁷¹ Ibid., 34.

³⁷² Ibid.

misery, and the Northeast as the site of resistance against dominant national narratives all flow throughout the cultural representations of revolution and poverty.

Chapter 4: Slavery, Abolition, and *Quilombos*: Racialized Narratives of Resistance

On 23 October 1960, *O Diário de Pernambuco* ran a feature story about “a preta Felipa” and her memories of the past century.³⁷³ The story opens with journalist Severino Barbosa describing Felipa Rosa de Lima’s eyes as “very alive and intelligent, they have observed a century of Brazilian history and seen secrets that if discovered, would revolutionize half the world.” But, according to the author, her mouth says nothing because Felipa does not like to remember the past and even less to disclose her secrets.

Felipa’s parents, Joaquim ‘Negro’ and Luisa Maria da Conceição, were slaves owned by coronel Manuel Carlos de Andrade in the interior of Paraíba, but Felipa was born free according to the Lei do Ventre Livre, and grew up in the “casa grande dos Pereira,” the grandson of Manuel Carlos de Andrade.³⁷⁴ Supposedly, Felipa lived in the familial ambiance of the Pereira household, helping to raise his children. She explained to the reporter that Manuel Carlos de Andrade “loved his slaves. In his house, there was never punishments, and it was unheard of to think about shackles, *o tronco* (trunk – torture device similar to stocks), chains or other tools that terrified slaves in other *senzalas*.” Her father, Joaquim Negro, was an “esteemed preto” at the heart of the plantation owner’s family and a hard worker, and her mother, “a strong

³⁷³ Severino Barbosa, “Testemunha de um século de história do Brasil: A preta Felipa prefere não falar do passado,” *Diário de Pernambuco*. 23 October 1960, 7.

³⁷⁴ The Pereira’s were one of the “big” families in the Northeast, and supposedly Felipa was the “irmã de leite” of dona Maria Augusta, who was related to the contemporary deputy, Marcolino Pereira.

and active mulata” preferred to work in the countryside as a cowhand than as a domestic servant.

Felipa remembered abolition as the “glorious day” that seemed to turn the world upside down. “The slaves shouted with happiness and went out running in the middle of the streets, cheering that Princesa Isabel had given them their freedom. At night, in the igreja do Rosário, the blacks celebrated. And from this moment on, they went back to their houses to raise their children and to become free.” But, the tragic memory was that of the Revolution of 1930, which, according to the *Diario de Pernambuco*, “like all revolutions, left a scar of blood in the Northeast.” The small rural area, “an obscure nest of freed slaves,” turned into the focus of national attention, with blood running in the streets. Felipa was taken prisoner and tortured by the revolutionaries because coronel Zê Pereira was an adversary of João Pessoa. Felipa remembered planes bombing the area and she claimed that no one slept any longer, constantly looking to the sky, waiting for the “evil bombs to fall.” The article stated that newspapers from afar told of the bloody battles in the Northeast, “of brothers killing brothers, in an inglorious struggle, motivated by violence, in which the results were more damaging than beneficial.” The journalist added his own conclusion to the retelling of the revolution, noting that “Felipa was right to not want to remember certain things.”

Felipa is quoted as saying, “I am a ‘negra velha,’ with white hair and an aged soul. (...) What happened, happened. It is part of the history of the sertão, of the time of slavery, slaves working the fields, asking the white master for his blessing. (...) I saw the abolition of slavery, I saw the empire fall and the start of the

República, I saw revolutions that frightened families, people running with fear from bullets and people dying in the streets. What do I want to remember these things for? I'm very old, I only want to rest in the last days of my life." The story ends with the journalist repeating the point, "Felipa saw everything but she prefers to forget. Why dig up the dead?"

The context in which this story appeared in the conservative mainstream newspaper must be taken into consideration, providing insight into the reasons for the story being newsworthy and also suggesting why certain narratives were emphasized. While it is impossible to know the conditions of the interview or even to know more about Felipa, it is possible to read her narrative to ask questions about the debates and struggles that were taking place in October of 1960. Even though the article was about her memories, the story emphasized the idea that it is better to forget and to not talk about the past. Felipa provided the newspaper with an "authentic" voice of an ex-slave woman who seemed to support the dominant narratives about the violence of revolutions, the benevolence of Brazilian slavery, and the legitimacy of abolition. These interpretations were all under negotiation in 1960, with rural social movements countering and rejecting such notions.

Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir had recently been staying in Recife, in the early part of October. Sartre published his monograph about the Cuban Revolution and commented about the revolutionary nature of Northeastern Brazil and its rural social activism underway, and was criticized explicitly by the *Diário de*

Pernambuco.³⁷⁵ Jânio Quadros visited Cuba with Francisco Julião at the end of September³⁷⁶ and the *Diário de Pernambuco* published a number of op-ed pieces and articles about the Cuban Revolution, denouncing the executions that had taken place and criticizing the fact that Cuba had started selling sugar to the Soviet Union.³⁷⁷ After the legal expropriation of the Engenho Galiléia in January of 1960, a number of new land invasions had taken place. Landowners claimed that the rural workers and member of the Ligas Camponesas threatened them with death, and rumors spread about the Ligas Camponesas setting fire to the canefields.³⁷⁸ And, *O Correio da Manhã* (Rio) published some of the first major reports on the Ligas Camponesas by Antonio Callado. Callado's book on the Ligas Camponesas was released, helping to turn the struggle for land in Northeastern Brazil into a national issue.³⁷⁹ In addition, in

³⁷⁵ Anibal Fernandes, "O que Sartre deveria saber," *Diario de Pernambuco* 18 August 1960, 4; Anibal Fernandes, "À margem de certas opiniões de Sartre," *Diario de Pernambuco*, 18 October 1960, 4; Olivio Montenegro, "A voz de Sartre," *Diario de Pernambuco* 13 November 1960, 4; Anibal Fernandes, "A furacão sobre Cuba," *Diario de Pernambuco* 18 December 1960, 4.

³⁷⁶ "PL e o MPJQ processam Francisco Julião e jornal," *Diario de Pernambuco* 30 September 1960, 1.

³⁷⁷ Malebranch Bernard, "Castro, o grande traidor," *Diario de Pernambuco* 7 August 1960, 7; Anibal Fernandes, "O propósito de nacionalismo," *Diario de Pernambuco* 10 August 1960, 4; Anibal Fernandes, "O caso dos cartazes," *Diario de Pernambuco* 15 September 1960, 4; "Protestos contra os fuzilamentos em Cuba," *Diario de Pernambuco* 20 October 1960, 12; Anibal Fernandes, "Só o 'Cuba Libre'!" *Diario de Pernambuco* 12 November 1960, 4.

³⁷⁸ "Polícia embalada garantiu engenho contra invasão de 150 camponesas," *Diario de Pernambuco* 7 June 1960, 7; "Engenhos de Paudalho estão infestados de comunistas," 9 June 1960, 7; "Moradores do Camaçari pedem mandado de segurança ao TJ," *Diario de Pernambuco*, 26 August 1960, 5; "Novos incêndios em canaviais inquerito contra o agricultor," *Diario de Pernambuco* 30 September 1960, 7; "Agricultores rebelados contra 'Ligas Camponesas' estão ameaçados de morte," *Diario de Pernambuco* 7 October 1960, 7.

³⁷⁹ Anibal Fernandes, "Reforma Agraria," *Diario de Pernambuco* 11 September 1960, 4; "Antonio Callado foi ao 'Galileia' e lançou ontem seus novos livros," *Diario de Pernambuco* 28 September 1960, 4.

late October 1960, Linduarte Noronha's *Aruanda*, about a quilombo community in the hills of Paraíba was first screened in Recife, at the São Luiz theater.³⁸⁰

By evaluating the article on Felipa within this historical context, it is possible to understand the emphasis on violence and the damaging effects of revolution. The mainstream media emphasized the idea that history in the Northeast of revolutions and rebellions were “better to forget” at the time when rural social movements were reframing historical narratives to create a broad base of support for land reform. The Ligas Camponesas engaged with threatening revolution, calling for an end to the traditional system of the latifundio. By this time the widespread fervor in support of the Cuban Revolution had waned. Whereas in 1959, even the *Diario de Pernambuco* editors had stated their support for the Cuban Revolution, by the mid 1960s, the *Diario* portrayed the Revolution as violent and as resulting in little change for Cuba. Instead of a triumph for Latin American independence, the *Diario* saw Cuba as having to decide between succumbing to either U.S. or Soviet imperialism. The presence of Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, and their support for Cuba, also seemed to threaten the traditional society of the Northeast with their declaration in favor of anti-colonial movements and revolution. Felipa's story suggested that the wise “subaltern” woman warned of the violence and uselessness of revolution for the majority of people, poor or rich.

Beyond serving as a poignant example of the conservative media's criticism of revolution and rebellion, Felipa's story also raises issues of race relations and slavery. According to the *Diario*, Felipa celebrated the Golden Law of abolition and

³⁸⁰ *Diario de Pernambuco*, 20 October 1960, 12, about the release of *Aruanda* scheduled for 29 October 1960.

recognized the benevolence of the “good” masters, who allowed for a peaceful transition from slave to free, and treated their slaves and workers with great respect and kindness. This dominant historical interpretation was being attacked by the Ligas Camponesas, by filmmakers, by intellectuals and by other social movements. The Ligas, for example, referred on a regular basis to the statement by Pernambucan abolitionist Joaquim Nabuco in which he claimed that abolition without agrarian reform would be incomplete.³⁸¹ While the metaphor of “slavery” was commonly appropriated during the Cold War to talk about both U.S. imperialism and Soviet imperialism,³⁸² the fact that Northeastern Brazil had been a slave society and the fact that non-free labor practices still existed in the 1950s and 1960s, gave the metaphor a different twist. And, by the early 1960s, many of the social movements were starting to question Northeast author and politician Gilberto Freyre’s notion of racial democracy.

In this chapter, I explore the multiple uses of the discourse and representations of slavery and race relations in the 1950s and 1960s and the connections drawn between these narratives, Northeastern identity and the struggle for land. While rural social movement leaders frequently employed the symbol of slavery, it acquired a

³⁸¹ 14.9.1885, Joaquim Nabuco said in a speech to Parliament “O abolicionismo significa a liberdade pessoal, ainda melhor, a igualdade civil de todas as classes sem execução—é assim uma reforma social; significa o trabalho livre, é assim uma reforma economica; significa no futuro a pequena propriedade, é assim uma reforma agraria, e como é uma explosão da dignidade humana, do sentimento da família, do respeito ao próximo, é uma reforma moral de primeira ordem.”

³⁸² Christina Klein, “Musicals and Modernization: Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *The King and I*” in *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War* eds., David C. Engerman, Nils Gilman, Mark Haefele, Michael Latham (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003): 146. Klein argues that “As a metaphor for communism, ‘slavery’ became linked in Cold War rhetoric with both ‘imperialism’ and the ‘Oriental.’”

number of meanings. Part of the objective of this chapter is to try to understand how racial identities formed a part of the struggle for land in the 1950s and 1960s, an issue that has been entirely excluded from the historiography on the Ligas Camponesas and the struggle for land in the Northeast. Although these social movements engaged with the language of “civil rights,” none of the movements sought to create a racialized identity (of black or Nordesteño against white), although this was implicit – and at times, explicit – in their political discourse. In this chapter, I show how, in what ways and in which context, the symbol of slavery was racialized and what this meant in terms of redefining regional identity. Even when a metaphor of slavery was strictly economic, in a region with a legacy of slavery, the implication of such a symbol must take into consideration racial connotations. It is also important to emphasize the strength of the discourse of racial democracy in Brazil and to point out that racialized discourses and identities had a much greater diversity of meanings beyond a “color line.” Nordesteño, in other words, can be the Other in Brazil without necessarily fitting neatly into legacies of Victorian racial hierarchies that privilege whiteness.

Certain characteristics have come to be associated with Nordesteño identity, strengthened by visual representations in the mass media of certain people who best embody these characteristics.³⁸³ For instance, certain actors (José Dumont) are

³⁸³ The idea of how Northeastern identity has created a visual idea of Nordesteños having certain physical characteristics is fascinating and difficult to analyze. Whereas scholars, filmmakers and authors have created a certain idealized version of the physical types of a Nordesteño, the reality is that it is impossible to pinpoint any certain physical characteristic as being specifically Nordesteño. For example, while gathering for Recife’s Gay Pride parade in 2005, I talked to a group of students about this question of Nordesteño identity. One of the women was blonde, fair-skinned and

regularly cast as Nordestinos because they embody (or have come to embody) the stereotypes associated with regional identity. While this is one “stereotype” of Nordestinos, another representation is of African decendency. In this chapter, I analyze representations of slaves, slavery and quilombos in popular culture to illustrate the ways in which this particular symbol came to represent the Northeast in the early 1960s. Whereas the discursive political use of the symbol of slavery was not always clearly racialized, representations of slavery in popular culture and film were more obviously connected to blackness. The questions that arise from this unstable division between discourse and popular representations demonstrate why it is important to analyze both to understand the construction of regional identities. Did the use of the symbol of slavery always have some lingering connection to transatlantic slavery, or was the Nordestino Cold War slave entirely different? Why was this particular symbol frequently used in the early 1960s? If the Nordestino slave

from the interior of Pernambuco but had lived many years in Rio de Janeiro, and she claimed that even though she was 100 percent Nordestina, most people did not identify her as being from the Northeast. The group then debated the issue, and agreed that this particular woman did not seem very “Nordestina,” but the group consensus was that I could easily be defined as Nordestina because of my relatively large forehead. (As a note, I am of Polish-American descent.) Undoubtedly, the idea of Nordestino would be different depending the context and the person’s subjectivity. But, the point of this anecdote is to emphasize the difficulty in determining “regional” characteristics and also the power that mass media such as film holds to create certain visual representations of the “Nordestino” in Brazilian society.

News reports on the Northeast seem to look for images that reproduce certain stereotypes of Nordestinos. And in a recent, popular telenovela, *A senhora do destino*, the main character was a Pernambucan immigrant who lived in Rio de Janeiro. The Carioca actress supposedly took lessons to acquire a Northeastern accent that led her to speak slowly and accentuated and to constantly throw in regional expressions such as “Oxente.” Since I had never heard a Nordestino talking in this way, I raised the issue with many people. (The eight o’clock novela is a frequent conversation topic throughout Brazil.) By and large, Nordestinos found her accent appalling or ridiculous while Cariocas and Paulistas praised its authenticity.

was depicted as black in popular culture, did this mean that all references to slavery during this period carried a connotation of blackness or Africanness? And, how did the narratives of slavery, abolition and quilombos either support or challenge the dominant narrative of racial democracy?

To address these questions, the chapter explores the political discourse of slavery, abolition and quilombos and representations in popular culture. The first part looks at how the idea of Nordestino as modern-day slaves was commonly used to describe the migrations to the South of Brazil. Then, I show the many ways that symbols of slavery, abolition and abolitionists were appropriated in the late 1950s and early 1960s in the debates over agrarian reform. The Ligas and the PCB frequently appropriated of the idea of Nordestinos as slaves in the 1950s and 1960s to challenge the violence of the latifundiario and the legitimacy of what was depicted as being a “feudal” system. But, in a region with a legacy of slavery, the question remains about whether or not rural workers found this identity appealing. The following section examines how the idea of racial democracy and transnational politics of race relations such as the Civil Rights movement in the United States connected to the struggles for land reform in Northeastern Brazil. Finally, I analyze the cultural representations of quilombos in films and other cultural productions to show how visual representations of rural Nordestinos acquired a (different) racialized meaning.

Nordestino Migrants as Slaves

By the mid-1950s, the continual migration of Nordestinos to the South began to generate public concern. This may have been related to what was depicted as an

“overflow” of workers fleeing the droughts and the poverty of the Northeast to look for work in the South, serving as some type of warning or advertisement against internal migration. Or, it may have arisen from general concern about the number of stories and cases of indentured labor. In the mid-1950s through the late 1950s, numerous reports in all types of media sources started describing the plight of Nordestinos in the South and their exploitation.

One of the issues raised about the internal migration was a racist argument that attempted to distinguish the Nordeste migrant as a different type of human species. A number of self-described “new intellectuals of the Northeast” started exploring the question of marginality and migration in conferences in the early 1950s throughout the Northeast.³⁸⁴ These studies produced the type of understanding that Lopes de Andrade described in 1955. According to Lopes de Andrade, Graciliano Ramos’s *Barren Lives* tells the dominant narrative of the Northeastern migrant, conceived as a pariah in the economic sense of the term.³⁸⁵ “The very clothing of this migrant – dirty, torn, smelling badly – quickly give us this erroneous impression [of the Nordeste as an economic pariah]. However, well analyzed in their social evolution, the half man of the Northeast is not an economic pariah, he is in no way a beggar in the Western and Christian meaning of the word. He is a marginal, marginal in the sociological classification, a person who is socially ‘different.’” The journalist continued by examining the historical roots of the “caboclos,” making the argument

³⁸⁴ Lopes de Andrade, *Forma e efeito das migrações do Nordeste* (Paraíba: A União Editora, 1952). The intellectuals associated with this include Robert E. Park (“The Human Migration and the Marginal Man”), Juarez Batista, Geraldo Sobral, Afonso Pereira, and Mauro Mota.

³⁸⁵ Lopes de Andrade, “Pobreza e migração no Nordeste,” *Diário de Pernambuco* 24 April 1955, 22-23.

that their indigenous roots influence their present day non-sedentary lifestyle. Supposedly their isolation from “civilization” had left Nordestinos in a state in which they can “successfully resist any attack from modern industrial society.” This “species” known in 1955 as flagelados or drought refugees, supposedly continued to multiply like “mushrooms” throughout the the sertão and the Northeast, “sifilisando a todos antes que se civilizassem, como diria Gilberto Freyre.” According to the journalist, Brazilian society should not incorporate flagelados as beggars because this type of classification would lead to a repetition of the system of slavery. But at the same time, the author argued that the situation was hopeless for the Northeast and the Nordestinos because of the culture of the flagelados who constantly looked for poverty and misery, be it in their “own habitat” or in the skyscrapers of Rio and São Paulo. “The history of the Northeast is deeply entrenched in the heart of the ‘Poligono das secas’.” In other words, some type of inherent cultural gene made flagelados enjoy misery and poverty, flee modern civilization and remain non-sedentary.

This interpretation was not an isolated remark or even unusual. For example, Oliveira Viana’s *Evolução do povo brasileiro*, first published in 1922, was republished in 1956 with a new preface, insisting on the need for Brazilians to accept the power of nationalism over regionalism. Viana argued that all Brazilians needed to evolve “socially, ethnically, and politically.”³⁸⁶ He argued that evolution was particularly critical for the “sub-raça mestiça” in the Northeast, where this “crossed type does not have somatological stability and is always subject to regressing to their

³⁸⁶ Oliveira Viana, *Evolução do povo brasileiro* (SP: Livraria José Olympio Editora, 1956) 4th ed. (First edition, 1922), 9.

original race.”³⁸⁷ This racist understanding is necessary to reference because it seeps into many of the descriptions and explanations of Nordesteño migrants as slaves in the 1950s. But, not everyone shared this understanding. Luis da Câmara Cascudo, for example, described what he called “mental miscegenation” a “defining characteristic” of Brazilians. Cascudo argued that “a northeastern peasant, after four years in São Paulo, is as much as a ‘paulista’ as a campones from Santos or Piracicaba.”³⁸⁸

Other articles focused on the “pull” factors inducing Nordesteños to migrate to the South and to the coastal urban areas. As an article in the *Diario de Pernambuco* stated in 1958: “Attracted by the splendor of the cities, the poor creatures look to survive and believe in the promise of their well being from the traffickers of human flesh.”³⁸⁹ The Catholic newspaper, *A Defesa* from Caruarú, Pernambuco, described in 1957 the rural exodus as coming from the miserable conditions in the countryside, “the chagas vivas that day by day are ruining the nation.” “Some day the matuto comes to the city and sees the free health care and starts to renounce their rural life.”³⁹⁰ With the 1958 drought, the number of flagelados increased, along with reports of “slavery.”

The São Lourenço newspaper, *A Hora*, printed an article on slavery in 1959, claiming that the Lei Áurea no longer was respected in Brazil, based on reports

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 191-192.

³⁸⁸ Luis da Câmara Cascudo, <http://memoriaviva.digi.com.br/todos.htm>, cited in Peter Michael Lownds, “In the Shadow of Freire: Popular Educators and Literacy in Northeastern Brazil,” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2006), 19.

³⁸⁹ Waldemar Valente, “Paisagem das secas,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 17 August 1958, 1.

³⁹⁰ Carlos Dôrria, “O éxodo rural,” *A Defesa: Jornal de Orientação Católica* (Caruarú) 25 May 1957, 3.

coming from Goiânia.³⁹¹ The “disillusioned” Nordestinos in their search for a better life were labeled “pau-de-arara” and sold like cattle. “In Goiânia, a single nordestino is sold starting at Cr.\$900 and a couple, including the woman and children, starting at Cr\$1.600.” The “slaves” were bought by fazendeiros in Minas Gerais and São Paulo. “In respect to the situation of our slaves, the news media say that the infelizes (miserable) nordestinos ‘live in shanties, without any furniture, without receiving any payment for working from sun up to sundown. Many try to escape and they try to reach the closest cities or if nothing else, they throw themselves into the river that divides the regions. Most of those who choose the river option drown to death. Others are captured or killed by the capitães-de-mato, kept by the fazendeiros. (...) In the middle of the atomic age, we are doing the worst thing, we are selling our own brothers! And long live democracy!’”³⁹²

The *Diario de Pernambuco* also ran an article in November of 1959 about the need to stop the trafficking of Nordestinos in “paus de arara,” referred to frequently as slave ships (navios negreiros), since this system had created a “real regime of

³⁹¹ “Escravidão,” *A Hora* (São Lourenço) 6 December 1959.

³⁹² “Em Goiânia, um nordestino solteiro é vendido a base de 900 cruzeiros e o casado, inclusive a mulher e os filhos, a base de 1.600 cruzeiros.” The “slaves” were bought by fazendeiros in Minas Gerais and São Paulo. “Tratando da situação dos novos escravos, diz as notícias que os infelizes nordestinos ‘vivem em barracões, sem qualquer mobiliário, sem receber qualquer remuneração, e trabalhar de sol a sol. As fugas são numerosos, pois muitos dos nordestinos não resistindo ao regime de trabalho forçado, tentam atingir as cidades mais próximas ou, ainda, atiram-se ao rio que faz a divisa entre as regiões. Estes últimos, na sua maioria morrem afogados. Os outros são recuperados ou mortos pelos capitães-de-mato mantidos pelos fazendeiros. (...) Em plena era atômica fazemos pior, vendemos os nossos irmãos! E vive a democracia!’”

slavery.”³⁹³ Supposedly the drivers used the idea of the South as the Promised Land to load 60 to 70 passengers in their trucks and charge 2-3 mil cruzeiros for each passenger. The passengers did not have the money to pay the ticket and thus entered into “slavery,” promising to repay the transportation by working under exploitative conditions dictated by their new employer. The article claimed that the only solution was federal intervention to stop the “Mercado dos nordestinos.”

The Communist Party also printed detailed descriptions of Nordestinos as slaves in *Novos Rumos*. For instance, Ana Montenegro referred to the case of Manoel da Costa Santos and Maria Francisca Santos, who were reportedly sold in the Mineira city of Montes Claros for Cr.\$4.000,00, “like a pair of animals.”³⁹⁴ Maria Francisca had supposedly lost all of her children and almost turned into a slave because of the miserable circumstances caused by the unequal distribution of land and power in Brazil. Montenegro said that Montes Claros and many other cities function as a “posto de venda de Nordestinos,” where the miserable Nordestinos are brought to be sold to fazendeiros, and have no protection. Fortunately for the couple that she describes, journalists bought them as proof of the infamous commercial transactions and so they were not bought as slaves. Another article also discussed the sale of Nordestinos in Natal, Rio Grande do Norte, stating that the drivers of the paus de arara received Cr.\$3.500,00 for each Nordestino they transported to the South.³⁹⁵ Once the Nordestinos arrived at the fazendas in the South, they were required to sign

³⁹³ “Tráfico de Nordestinos e Intervenção Federal,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 15 November 1959, 1.

³⁹⁴ Ana Montenegro, “Venda dos Nordestino,” *Novos Rumos* (Rio) March 1959, 11.

³⁹⁵ “Cr.\$3.500,00 por cabeça e dois anos de escravidão,” *Novos Rumos* 27 March – 2 April 1959, 10.

a contract that gave them the right to three meals a day, and Cr.\$60,00 daily wages, but with the understanding that this money would only be paid after two years of labor. The fazendeiro subtracted the transportation cost from this amount as well as the expenses accrued while working on the fazenda.

In contrast to the earlier claim that the Nordesteño is naturally a beggar or used to the non-sedentary life, the article in *Novos Rumos* refers to the case of a young man of 18 years, who told the reporter that he is healthy and a good, strong worker, “ ‘but I feel ashamed, well, it has been 40 days that I’ve been wandering through the city looking for a job and I haven’t found one. I had to beg for crumbs on the streets, wash dishes in hotels to feed myself.’”³⁹⁶ In the end he decided to sell himself to a fazendeiro with the hope that at the end of the two year period, he would have Cr.\$40.000,00 and be able to start a new life.³⁹⁷

Novos Rumos published a poem, similar to the style of literatura de cordel in dialect, about the life of the migrant in 1959. Zê Praxedi, “the cowboy poet,” described the conditions of life in the sertão as becoming unsustainable, so he decided that at the end of April, he would go to Rio. (Note: original Portuguese version of the poem is in the footnote and is recommended because of the nature of poetry and the dialect that is not found in my translation.)

“This past week/ The caboclo Zê Vicente/ Gave us the news/ That still now makes me feel happy/ That there is a rich Mineiro (person from Minas Gerais)/ Who is in the sertão buying people. I thought the price, my friend/ of a Brazilian was cheap/ Being that he is a good

³⁹⁶ “ ‘mas me sinto envergonhado, pois há 40 dias que perambulo pela cidade à procura de um trabalho e não encontro; tive que mendigar migalhas pelas ruas, lavar pratos nos hotéis para me alimentar.’”

³⁹⁷ “Cr.\$3.500,00 por cabeça e dois anos de escravidão,” *Novos Rumos* 27 March – 2 April 1959, 10.

worker/ Well-respected and a quick worker/ not very sick/ He is worth the miserable amount/ of only Cr.\$2.000,00. If hunger is worth more/ I'm going to think about what to do/ what people here have to do/ If it means dying of hunger/ then we will sell ourselves at a cheap price/ Those of us from Ceará/ while we don't go there/ We don't know why we were born. The paper is very expensive/ for this reason, I arrived at the end/ Bless your affiliated/ and your esteemed compadre/ Chico Nobe Serafim."³⁹⁸

The point of the poem is to demonstrate the conditions of hunger and poverty that encourage the Nordesteño to migrate to the south and accept being "sold," but the poem also shows that the Nordesteño feels forced into the situation and realizes his exploitation.

The Ligas Camponesas also provided reports on slavery existing in the South in *LIGA*.³⁹⁹ For example, one such article denounced slave labor in Campos, Guanabara, described as a rich, "progressive" municipality in the south where seven Ligas had already formed. The front page image is of a woman worker carrying cane, and the story claims that the rural workers and their families have been subjected to a cruel slave regime, where even the "tronco dos escravos" (torture device similar to stocks) has been preserved by the feudal masters of the plantation. *LIGA* described the field workers as pariahs, claiming that they live and work like a "sub-human species," terrorized by the "lei da chibata" (whip). The workers in the usina (mill)

³⁹⁸ Zê Praxedi, "Carta do Sertão," *Novos Rumos* March 1959, 11. "Essa semana passada/ O cabôco Zê Vicente/ Deu a nós u'a nutiça/ Qu'inté me dêxô contente:/ Que tem um minêro rico/ No sertão comprando gente. Achei barato, cumpade,/ O preço dum brasileiro/ Sendo bom trabajadô/ Respeitadô e ligêro/ Num tando munto duente,/ Vale, miseravimente/ Apenas, dois mi cruzêro! Sendo fome vale mais./ Vô pensá como se faz/ Cum pessuá qui nós temo/ Se é de morrê de fome/ Barato mermo vendemo./ Nós, aqui do Ceará/ inquanto num vamos lá/ Num sabe pra que nacemo. O papé tá munto caro,/ Purisso chequei ao fim/ Abençôï teus afiado/ O teu cumpade istimado/ Chico Nobe Serafim.

³⁹⁹ "Trabalho escravo nos canaviais de Campos," *LIGA* 6 November 1962, 1; "Campos: Regime de Escravidão Impera nos canaviais," *LIGA* 6 November 1962, 4.

supposedly had developed class consciousness and were better organized but the landowners kept them isolated from the field workers (lavoura), so as to maintain their control over the latter. These workers received low wages but more problematic was the fact that they were required to pay a “taxa de habitação” or rent that was overpriced. In order to make the cane quota, women and children joined the labor force even though the only one paid was the male head of the family.

Slavery and Agrarian Reform

One of the main objectives of the Ligas Camponesas was to end what they called “feudal” labor relations. They wanted the unpaid labor systems, such as the *cambão*, *eito*, declared illegal.⁴⁰⁰ In Francisco Julião’s *Cambão – The Yoke*, the first paragraph of the introduction describes *cambão* as “A spark setting the countryside ablaze; a match under a charge as old as the peasant or slave himself; and a word signaling the start of a long and arduous journey. In every language in the world it has many

⁴⁰⁰ As Julião defined, “*cambão* is the day’s unpaid labour demanded by landowners once a week from their peasants as rent for their land.” Francisco Julião, *Cambão-The Yoke: The Hidden Face of Brazil* (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1972), 11. Also, “Contrato de Arrendamento só favorece ao fazendeiro,” *LIGA* 18 December 1962, 1; and, a letter by Francisco Julião published in *O Diário de Pernambuco*: “como a lei não protegê os camponeses só há um caminho: congregá-los, despertá-los, politisá-los, para que a lei se faça. A lei, outrora, defendia a escravidão. A ordem era LEILÃO DE ESCRAVOS como, hoje, ainda é o CAMBÃO.” “Uma carta do dep. Francisco Julião,” *Diário de Pernambuco*, 31 January 1961, 6.

names, and each means slavery.”⁴⁰¹ The Ligas tried to establish a minimum wage for rural workers, hourly and weekly limits, and extend the CLT (Consolidação de Leis Trabalhistas) to rural workers. But what seemed to be the dual objective in appropriating the symbol of slavery in regards to the struggle for land reform was to question and challenge the violence employed by large landowners and the police to control rural workers. Slavery, or slave systems, frequently cited by social movement leaders and popular poets, turning into a relatively common way to question the legitimacy of the landowners, the police and the latifundio system.

The Ligas emphasized the violence of the latifundio system and how the large landowners still employed punishments regarded as vestiges from the time when the Northeast was a slave society. As Marcos Martins da Silva, President of the Sindicato dos Trabalhadores Rurais dos Municipios de Escada, Ipojuca e Amaragi, Pernambuco, stated, “the Lei do tronco, kidnappings and solitary confinement in prison rule in the municipio of Escada. The worst terror in the world reins on the engenhos banguês, which are really just branches of the usinas and the engenhos Solidade, Arandu, Canto Escuro, Sapucagi e Conceição. The hired thugs of the latifundiários are armed with the 1908 guns of the Armed Forces and with portable machine guns. The “early morning bath” (*banho da madrugada*), beatings and even the death penalty are dictated by the latifundiários, those who make the laws on their engenhos.”⁴⁰²

⁴⁰¹ Julião, *Cambão-The Yoke*, 11. The book was originally published in Spanish, *Cambão: La cara oculta de Brasil* (México: Siglo Vientiuno Editores, 1968); and later in Portuguese, English, and French.

⁴⁰² “Trabalhadores Rurais ganham salários de morte,” *LIGA* 13 November 1962, 3.

The Ligas also illustrated visually what they claimed was the state of contemporary labor relations in the countryside. These illustrations portray how the Ligas saw race relations as a part of the regime of slave labor. Unlike photographs that might be more difficult to interpret in terms of racial meaning in Brazil, the illustrations unquestionably mark the landowners as white and the workers as black.

Figure 1

Drawing in *LIGA* 13 November 1962, p.3.

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

A poem by Pereira de Sousa, entitled “Nordeste Escravo” also describes the situation in Northeastern Brazil in terms of slavery.

“Black slavery was abolished/ That was a disgrace for all of Brazil/
But today for an enormous number of people/ are the needle pricks of
a new type of slave. Today, in Northeastern lands/ the poor peasant
lives enslaved/ who only receives tips for salary/ that they pay him in
vouchers every month. Barefoot, half-naked, hoe on the shoulders/ He
is in a sad situation, hungry and enslaved/ Cultivating yet always more

bitter. And this repeats scenes of slavery/ When the peasants marched to work/ Well, if you caught sight of them, robust and always proud/ Resisting the figure of the plantation foreman. Grasping the thick whip in his hand/ with his breeches and high boots/ And with disdain he aims at his brothers/ who are less esteemed, on the other side of luck. But if the yoke of the cambão falls apart/ If they pay cash and not vouchers/ and if there are inspectors in every shanty/ And if the fight against the misery and the evil/ then with the support of Nabuco/ the Northeast will ring with redemption/ Because it will already have passed the apprenticeship/ that it needs for a new abolition.”⁴⁰³

Another poem, literatura de cordel, published in a Northeastern newspaper, *Gazeta de Patos: Orgão Livre e Rebelde a Serviço do Sertão Paraibano* in December 1962,

linked the condition of the rural worker to slaves, in the form of a conversation, typical of literatura de cordel.⁴⁰⁴ It starts with the following statement: (The different voice is in **bold**.)

“The land is for those who work it/ It is for those who plant it/ and never for those who live off/ of our misery by exploiting us.”⁴⁰⁵ The conversation develops between Zeca Moreira and his friend, who Zeca continues to try to convince about the reality of the opening statement. (**“It is not stupid, my friend/ You can believe that it is true/ I’ve already heard people talking/ about such things in the city.”**)

⁴⁰³ Pereira de Souza, “Nordeste Escravo” *LIGA* 25 December 1962, 3. Foi abolida a negra escravidão/ Que foi opróbrio no Brasil inteiro/ Mas, hoje sobre enorme multidão/ Os agulhões de um novo cativo. Vive hoje, ainda em terra nordestinos/ Escravizado, o pobre camponês/ Que apenas por salário tem propinas/ Que lhes pagam em vales todo mês. Descalço, semi-ni, enxada os ombros,/ Vai tristonho, faminto e escravizado/ Amanhã mas sempre amargurado. E se repetem cenas de cativo/ Quando os campônios marcham ao labor/ Pois se avista, robusta e sempre altivo,/ Repelente figura de um feitor. Grosso azorrague empunha ele nas mãos/ De primeiros botinas e culote/ E com desdém ‘aponta’ aos seus irmãos/ menos presos, ao revés da sorte. Pue se desfça o jugo do cambão/ Quese pague dinheiros e não vales/ E que haja fisco em todo barracão/ E se combatam da miséria os males/ Que ressurgm Nabuco, Patrocínio/ Pois o Nordeste clama redenção/ Porque já tem formado a tirocínio/ De ser precisa nova abolição.”

⁴⁰⁴ Zê Taveira, “Conversa de Camponês,” *Gazeta de Patos: Orgão Livre e Rebelde a Serviço do Sertão Paraibano*, 31 December 1962, 6.

⁴⁰⁵ “A terra é de quem trabalha/ É de quem sua prantando/ E nunca desses qui vivem/ nossa miseria explorando.”

So, you're thinking/ that we were born equal/ with some of us living to rest/ and othes to work too much?

(It is true that a Christian/ kills himself alone, on a plot of land/ It was when the harvest comes/ he is the owner of only one little bite.)

The meia, my friend, the terça (forms of unpaid labor)/ are forms of exploitation/ And if it stopped there, it would be OK/ but it not only this. There are people who fence off land/ and at the same time the claim the land as theirs/ they never work it/ they don't let themselves work.

(But this exists, Seu Zeca/ As a way of distinguishing people/ as to those who are literate/ and those who don't have any schooling.)

There is no difference/ all that exists is exploitation/ Even without being literate/ You have a understanding of the world. The others who are wise/ who know how to read and write/ Think that ignorance/ keeps us tied up. And they don't open school/ Out here in the sertão/ The only purpose of which/ is to maintain slavery. I know that there are many caboclos/ Who don't know their rights/ For this reason they don't fight it/ They think everything is how it should be. For this reason what we need/ everyone, everywhere observing/ that we are slaves/ and what we need to do is to fight against it.

(You are speaking so beautifully/ You even seem like a doctor (educated person)/ But you are illiterate/ The same as me. Who taught you these things/ Where did you learn/ that things could be difference/ from how we were born?)

The son of Noca, my friend/ factory worker in the city/ Told me that in our hands/ is where we can find happiness. There where he works/ There is a whole workers world/ And they go on strike/ to obtain a raise in salary. He said that they asked/ and they asked again a little later/ and that the patrão (boss/owner) did not respond/ He realized that it was a problem. So then they decided/ that the work had to stop/ And they only returned to the factory/ when the boss raised the salary. **(So, the work stopped?)**

Everyone crossed their arms/ until he raised the salary/ and the son of Noca explained to me that the slavery that exists/ there is a lot that has to end/ The spoils, for who harvests/ is the same for those who plant.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁶ “**Não é besteira, cumpadre/ Pode crer que é verdade/ Já escutei se falar/ Dessas coisa na cidade.** Você então tá pensando/ Que nós nascemos iguais/ foi pra uns viver folgado/ E outros trabaiá demais? **Tá certo que um Cristão/ Se mate so, num roçado/ Erá quando vem a coiêta/ Sê dono só dum bocado?** A meia cumpade, a terça,/ São formas de exploração/ Se parasse aí, vá lá,/ Mas não é só isso não. Tem gente que cerca terra/ Só mesmo mode cercá/ Que nela nunca trabáia/ Nem deixa se trabaiá. **Mas isso existe, Seu Zeca/ Prumode da distinção/ Entre a gente que é letrada/ E os qui não tem instrução.** Não existe diferença/ O que existe é exploração/ Mesmo assim, sem ser letrado/ Você tem compreensão. Os outros qui

And, the “Hymn of the Ligas Camponesas” also referred to slavery:

“Comrades and brothers in suffering
Our song of pain rises from the land.
It is a (...) seed that the wind
Broadcasts through the valley and over the hill.

Chorus

The flag that we adore
Should not be stained
With the blood of a race
Chained to a hoe

We do not wish to live in slavery
Nor leave the country where we were born
For the land, for peace, and for bread
Comrades, we band together and we march

Our hands are goldenly callused
Attesting to our hard and honored labor
Brazil without us has no treasure
Without us Brazil has no future.”⁴⁰⁷

são sabido/ Qui sabem lê e escrevê/ Pensam que a ignorancia/ Empata a gente de vê.
E não que abi escolas,/ Aqui fora no sertão/ Só de vontade qui tem/ De manter a
escravidão. Sei qui há muito cabôco/ Qui não sabe o seu direito./ Pru via desso não
luta,/ Pois acha tudo bem feito. Porrisso é qui nós percisa/ Por todo canto espaiá/ Qui
chega de escravidão/ E qui a gente tem qui lutá. **Tu tá falando bonito/ Até parece
um dotô/ Tú qui é analfabeto/ Igualzinho como eu sô. Quem te insinou essa coisa/
Onde foi qui tú aprendeu/ Qui pode sê diferente/ De como a gente nasceu?** O Fi
a Nóca, cumpade/ Operario da cidade,/ Me contou qui em nossas mão/ é qui tá a
felicidade. Qui lá onde ele trabáia/ Tem um mundão operário/ E qui fizeram uma
greve/ Pelo aumento de salário. Ele disse qui pediram/ Qui pediram mais um pouco/
E qui o patrão nem ligou/ Fez conta qui era môco. Eles então resorreram/ Para o
trabáio pará/ E só voltarem pra fábrica/ Quando o patrão aumentá. **E o trabalho
parô?** Todo mundo cruzou braço/ Até que ele, aumentou/ E o fi da Noca explicó: A
escravidão lá pra fora/ Ha muito qui se acabou/ Nas istrajas, o qui se cóie/ É mesmo
de quem prantou.

⁴⁰⁷ Vice Consul Edwards Walters provided this “hymn” in a dispatch in 1960 after going to the Engenho Galiléia and meeting with the Ligas Camponesas members, but this is the only place I have found the hymn and it was in the English translation.

In a letter to Francisco Julião that was in the DOPS-PE file on the Ligas Camponesas from Lourenço Freitas of Upatininga, Pernambuco, Freitas described the misery of the cane worker in the area, asking for Julião's assistance in organizing the rural workers. In it he described: "Na zona, é a região típica da miséria, onde muitos engenhos o trabalhador vive em situação identica a os negros do século passado."⁴⁰⁸ Padre Crespo, of the Church Federations of Rural Workers, also used the language of slavery to describe the situation of Nordeste peasants: "O nordestino é um escravo. Vivemos numa civilização escravocrata se bem que disfarçada. Há formas de escravidão piores do que as da escravidão negra. Homens que só têm deveres, mas, não têm direitos."⁴⁰⁹

The new abolition, according to the Ligas Camponesas, was radical agrarian reform. In 1962, Julião made the famous statement of the "Carta de Alforria do Camponês" or the Peasant's Manumission Letter. The first line reads, "From here, Recife, Pernambuco, the cradle of the Ligas Camponesas, I send you this letter, peasants of Brazil, with the hope that it will arrive in your home." Throughout the declaration, Julião uses the "tu" form to address the peasant, a familiar term but relatively uncommon in Brazil. The first section, entitled "The Union" describes the regime of poverty and violence that dictates the life of the Brazilian peasant. Julião

Brazil. U.S. Embassy. Classified General Records, 1941-1963. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State. Foreign Service Dispatch 7 Sept 1960, from AmConsul Recife to Dept of State. Subject: The Ligas Camponesas of Pernambuco, Confidential. RG 84, Box 128, Folder 500: Northeast 1961. National Archives.

⁴⁰⁸ Secretária da Segurança Pública – Pernambuco. Prontuário Funcionário: Ligas Camponesas s/numero., no. 29.796, January 1956. Copy of a letter to Julião from Xisto Lourenço Freitas, no. 125. DOPS-PE. Recife.

⁴⁰⁹ "Padre Crespo vê na sindicalização rural a última esperança do trabalhador do campo," *Diário de Pernambuco* 17 August 1962, 11.

tells the peasants that the Ligas are the “closed hand” of solidarity between all the rural workers and the world rebels such as Jesus Christ, Francisco de Assis, Mao Tse-Tung, and Fidel Castro. “Alone you are a drop of water but together you are a waterfall,” Julião instructs.

Part II describes the paths or ways to bring freedom to the peasant. Julião describes freedom as land, bread, medicine, school, and peace. The next section is on the Liga, described as the first step in the path for freedom. Julião asks, “what does democracy mean to the peasant? I will explain it to you. It is taking the soldier from your doorstep. It is disarming the capanga (hired thug). Because your issues should be resolved in the courts and never by the police, much less by the capanga.” In this section, Julião attacks the cambão and the voucher system, stating that these exist in the countryside throughout Brazil and are anti-democratic, a way for “the latifundio to enslave you.” Julião emphasizes that all rural workers need to join the Liga, because this is the way to work together for freedom, “the guide that can show you the way to freedom.”

The rural union (*sindicato*) is the fourth section, and Julião distinguishes between rural workers who work the land and those who are *eiteiro*, or hired hands, that supposedly have no rights to anything, work sunup to sundown, die early, hungry, tired. “You are slave by day, slave by night. You wake up a slave and go to bed a slave. Your child cries with hunger and when he dies, you don’t even feel pain, because your heart is no longer a heart, but a callus in your chest. Your way is the sindicato, because you are already a factory worker (*operário*).” Julião states that the Communist Party rural unions are better than the Church unions because the priests

will not fight for freedom. “They will only light a candle and hand you off like a package to the latifundio.

The other possible path, indicated in the fifth section, is the cooperative, described as being “all for one and one for all.” The cooperative supposedly is the best way to fight against the latifundio, where all the *foreiros*, *posseiros*, small and middle landholders work together to produce products for market, sharing the rewards. The sixth part “a human and just law” describes the “Lei Trabalhista” that needs to be extended to rural workers. The emphasis is placed on everyone working together against the latifundio, against tyranny, and for land reform and freedom. And the seventh section discusses the need for enfranchisement of illiterates. According to Julião the number of illiterates who cannot vote compose half of the Brazilian population. Not only should they have the right to education, but they should also have the right to vote.

Shortly before the military coup, the Pernambucan Communist Party published a story in *A Hora* about the punishments used on some of the *engenhos* in Pernambuco.⁴¹⁰ In the Municipio of João Alfredo, the rural worker Severino Francisco dos Santos refused to give the landowner the day of unpaid labor, (*cambão*), and was “medievally beaten up with blows and struck by a raw leather whip, until he he lost his senses, by the hired thugs of the *senhor de engenho* of the *fazenda Cascaval*, property of Sr. Severino Augusto de Albuquerque.” Another report, by Estanislau Oliveira described the violent acts committed by the latifundiário of Engenho Serra, notorious for being one of the most violent *engenhos*

⁴¹⁰ “Latifúndio comete novo crime,” *A Hora* 22 – 28 February 1964, 1.

(located near Engenho Galiléia outside of Vitória de Santo Antão): “they varied the beatings with cipó-pau (type of vine associated with slave punishment), xique-xique (cactus), horse whip, where they burned peasants, still alive who were considered rebels, placing a strong current on the necks of those who were tied to a tronco (stocks) with open arms to the Big House, the pulling out of facial hair for arriving late or working slowly, murders in the middle of the night, while everyone was asleep (the bodies were thrown into the pond/water reservoir, where many bones were later discovered), and the refusal to let any professor enter the engenho.”⁴¹¹

Givaldo Rios, writing for another Recife-based Communist Party newspaper, the *Jornal dos Bancários*, described the details of what he called, “life on the Engenho Serra.”⁴¹² Photographs by Fernando Castro showed men pointing upwards on the engenho, to the following description: “A ‘força’ como é chamado o instrumento que o latifundiário condenava aqueles camponeses que discordavam de sua ‘lei’ e que registarmos na foto acima. Era nesse instrumento de suplício que a justiça federal funcionava impunemente no Engenho Serra.” Rios described the conditions and the struggle for land and against the violence of the Engenho Serra, owned at the time by the ex-Secretário de Segurança Pública, Alarcio Bezerra Cavalcanti. Supposedly only one worker of the fifty families on the engenho was literate, most were over 60 years old and the landowner had been involved in throwing workers off the engenho for years. He quoted an unnamed rural worker who described the atrocities that had taken place: “ ‘O que o doutor Arraes e Julião quiser, nós faremos. Quanto às ossadas desinterramos todas deste engenho e

⁴¹¹ Lauro Goes, “A tragédia do Engenho Serra,” *A Hora* 14-20 March 1964, 3.

⁴¹² Givaldo Rios, “A vida no Engenho Serra,” *Jornal dos Bancários* 6 March 1964, 2.

pertencem a diversas vítimas, ex-moradores destas terras.” He pointed at a 12-year-old child and explained, “ ‘o pai daquele ali foi amarrado a uma pedra e avoadado assim dentro do lago que fica na frente da Casa Grande. Outros foram enforcados e alguns queimados vivos na ‘estufa.’ Todas essas moretes foram feitas sem grandes motivos. Bastava que algum morador resolvesse abandonar o serviço e fosse procurar outras terras para trabalhar, ou fosse ainda pegado chupando cana ou fruta do engenho, para que recebesse como castigo a vingança do Coroné Alarece.”

Another rural worker with three children told the reporter the story of what happened to her husband. Álzira Lourdes da Silva testified

“Meu marido estava cortando cana quando seu cachimbo provocou acidentalmente um pequeno incendio. Mesmo queimando os braços e com a ajuda de outros companheiros, as chamas forma debeladas, não indo o prejuizo além de uma braçada de cana. À noite, quando estavam dormindo, a polícia invadiu o nosso mocambo e o levou para Recife. Durante 45 dias, José ficou preso, sendo surrado e mal comido.

Depois foi trazido pelos guardas aqui para o engenho onde foi pendurados pelos braços na ‘forca.’ Ali pedurado foi sacudido com violencia diversas vezes de encontr à parede até ficar banhado de sangue. Quando ia sendo levado quase morto para a ‘estufa,’ chorando eu me diriji junto com outras mulheres ao Coroné Alarico e pedimos que não queimasse José. Ele então nos respondeu – Vocês são umas miseraveis atrevidas que me vêm pedir ara não queimar este homem. Ele deve ser queimado da mesmo forma como queimou minhas canas. Mas apesar de não ser queimado, ele vai se arrepender. E, em seguida levou José preso e amarrado em companhia de vários capangas. No dia seguinte, seu moço, quando fomos nos aproximando da casa grande, vimos o pobre José pedendurado pelo pescoço por um corrente, amarrado ali e apontou para uma árvore junto a casa grande. Somente agora é que nos pode contra tudo isso, pois o Coroné não está aqui.”

When I visited the Engenho Galiléia in 2005 and spoke to some of the ex-Ligas Camponesas members, they recalled the Engenho Serra and described it as one

of the most violent engenhos in the area. Stories, perhaps rumors, continued to be told in the rural Northeast about the many human bones that were found in the açude when it dried up on the Engenho Serra. The ex-Ligas militants remembered the violence on the Engenho Galiléia, perpetrated by the capangas and the police, and spoke with pride about Julião, saying that he had “freed” them, that “slavery” no longer existed in the community. One of the reasons why the metaphor of slavery was powerful throughout the Northeast was that, at times, the type of power wielded on the engenho by the landowner and supported by the police resembled the violence of slave society.

Interpretations and Representations of Abolition

The idea of abolition and the image of abolitionists acquired many different meanings in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The cultural representations and historical interpretations shifted dramatically from a top-down narrative of slave owners “teaching” their slaves about abolition, as depicted in the films *Sinha Moça* (1953) and Oswaldo Censoni’s *João Negrinho* (1954)⁴¹³ to a bottom-up narrative. Social movement leaders used abolition as an example of the type of social struggle necessary for agrarian reform and they used the theme of abolition to call into question the legitimacy of the power of the latifundio and the government. For instance, in the *Diario do Congresso Nacional* in December 1959, (circled in red and held in the DOPS-PE files), Antonio Callado testified in Brazilian Congress about the

⁴¹³ Robert Stam, “Slow Fade to Afro: The Black Presence in Brazilian Cinema,” *Film Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (Winter 1982): 16-32.

need for agrarian reform and for supporting the expropriation of Engenho Galiléia. In his testimony, he used the language of slavery and abolition to argue that the force of agrarian reform was impossible to revert: “Eu confesso que não vejo aqueles bravos caboclos da Galiléia expulsos do seu pequeno ninho de homens livres. Não vejo tal coisa e destetaria vê-la. Aqueles homens morreriam de vergonha e de malancolia, voltando ao tronco e chicote depois de quatro anos de liberdade. Garanto que eles preferam morrer das balas do capitão José Lopes.”⁴¹⁴ Northeastern abolitionists, as well as famous foreign liberators of slaves such as Abraham Lincoln, were resurrected and turned into symbols for social movement leaders engaged in the struggle for land reform.⁴¹⁵

Francisco Julião found a historical ally in abolitionist Joaquim Nabuco who had delivered speeches and writings on the necessity for agrarian reform as a component of abolition. Julião used Nabuco not only as a way to promote agrarian reform and gain support from rural workers, but also to counteract, morally and patriotically, those who criticized agrarian reform and the Ligas Camponesas. For

⁴¹⁴ Testimony of Antonio Callado, *Diário do Congresso Nacional (seção I)* 3 December 1959, p.9220-9222. In: Secretária da Segurança Pública – Pernambuco. Prontuário Funcionário: Ligas Camponesas: Caiçara, Engenho Barra, Engenho Caehaira, Vitória de Santo Antão. March 1951 – June 1969. no. 29309, (24-25). DOPS-PE. Recife.

⁴¹⁵ Supporters of the Ligas Camponesas regularly referred to Francisco Julião as an “Abraham Lincoln.” In what appeared to be an attempt to debunk this association, the *Diário de Pernambuco* published an insert in May 1963 (no association claimed) with a picture of Lincoln and the following statement: “A propriedade é o fruto do trabalho; a propriedade é desajável. É um bem positivo do mundo. Alguém sendo rico, mostra que os outros também poderão tê-lo e isto é encorajamento para a indústria e a iniciativa pessoal. Não deixe aquele que não tem casa destruir a de outrem. Mas dê uma oportunidade para trabalhar diligentemente e construir uma para si, assegurando também com esse exemplo, que ela estará a salvo de violência depois de edificada.” *Diário de Pernambuco* 24 May 1963, 7

instance, in July 1959, the *Diario de Pernambuco* published a letter from Francisco Julião to Zilde Maranhão, a journalist who Julião claimed wrote in support of the Associação dos Fomecedores de Cana.⁴¹⁶ Julião labeled Maranhão as a person who stood against the glorious Pernambucan past and the ideals of Joaquim Nabuco. Julião stated that freeing peasants from the “feudal regime of the latifundio” was in fact part of the long process of emancipation. In Julião’s efforts to urge Maranhão to refrain from criticizing the Ligas Camponesas, he referred to Maranhão’s hometown:

“I don’t remember if it was Aliança, your birthplace, or Nazaré da Mata, where some of the senhores-de-engenho wrote letters to tell other slave masters about what Nabuco was threatening and advising them to not give shelter to that communist agitator, carbonário, and nihilist. Look here, Zilde, at what Nabuco and his contemporaries said. I really doubt that even one of the grandchildren of the slave masters would today denounce their grandfather as an enemy of abolition. His memory would be destroyed and this grandson would feel isolated in the editorial office of the newspaper where you work, in the club that you attend, in the association that you are a part of, in any place in this country. The day is not far off that this grandson will keep silent about the horrible crimes that they are committing against the peasant in the regime of the cambão, vara, meia, terça, vale, barracão and any other of the thousands of ways the peasant’s work is exploited.”

Julião urged Maranhão to read the poetry of Castro Alves about slavery, “Palavras de um conservador,” so that Maranhão could understand the side that he was supporting. And Julião also claimed that agrarian reform was the only way to destroy the slave regime that continues intact.

The 75th anniversary of the Lei Aurea (Golden Law) was celebrated on May 13, 1963. The Pernambucan Communist Party publication, *A Hora*, connected abolition with agrarian reform, suggesting that if abolition had become a law, agrarian

⁴¹⁶ Francisco Julião, “Desafio do deputado socialista ao jornalista Zilde Maranhão para um debate sobre reforma agrária,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 15 July 1959, 8.

reform could become a law.⁴¹⁷ “The main argument that was used then is identical to what they are using today against agrarian reform, which is, according to them, that the national patrimony will be stolen, as if once freed, slaves would leave to work in other regions of the globe. Similarly, they argue that if land were to be redistributed to many different people it would not be as productive, but really it would multiply in its productivity through the live interest of thousands and thousands of new landowners.” The anniversary of abolition was seen as a model to stimulate the struggle for the abolition of the oppressed suffered by thousands of Brazilians still caught in a feudal and precaptialist situation, and one that needed to develop and transform for the emancipation of the Brazilian economy as well.

The Communist Party *Novos Rumos* published a historical analysis of the struggle over abolition in Brazil, with the explicit intention of comparing it to the process of combating the abolition of the latifundio.⁴¹⁸ The article proposed to rethink the role of Princess Isabel in the process of abolition, portraying her actions as generated by the pressure from the *povo* and the “authentic leaders” who fought against groups struggling to preserve their privileges.

According to the article, the history of slavery was the history of struggle. “It can be said, without any fear of exaggeration, that the struggle against slavery started when slave labor was first introduced in this country. It was not possible that the black brought from Africa submitted himself without protesting this antinatural, antihuman labor for which he was destined. This history of slavery in Brazil is a

⁴¹⁷ “Abolição da escravatura faz (amanhã) aniversário,” *A Hora* 11 – 17 May 1963, 7.

⁴¹⁸ “Abolição: Reforma de Base Conquistada no Século XIX,” *Novos Rumos* 17 – 23 May 1963, 8.

heroic chapter of escape, quilombos and rebellions.” The article discusses the rebellions, laws, events, and numerous associations throughout the nineteenth century that led to abolition. What is most interesting is the emphasis the article placed on certain groups and their influence on bringing about abolition. The article discussed the influence of student groups; for instance, the campaign of “limpeza das ruas” led by students at the Escola Politécnica, asking slaveowners to free their slaves, which supposedly led to the streets of Ouvidor, 7 de Setembro, Uruguainana, Travessa Ouvidor becoming “slave-free.” Women, actors, musicians and artists also supposedly played a major role in organizing the campaign for abolition. The methods, as the article claims, “are the same methods used today” to organize the popular campaign against slavery.

The article discussed legal debates at the time, focusing on what certain leaders were saying about the need to preserve slavery, since abolition would supposedly cause chaos and disorder. “Those in the Parliament defended the thesis - that they still use today in the case of many peasants - that it would not take one step forward to abolish slavery without “preparing” slaves for their new lives.” The article points out that one of the main arguments against abolition was the threat to the principle of private property. In conclusion, the author claims that the same issues confront Brazilians today and that few things have changed in terms of methods and forms of struggle needed to make profound structural changes.

Linking this history to the present struggles of agrarian reform, the author writes,

“The example of the past guides our present struggles. Abolition of slavery teaches us that it would have never come about without mass

mobilization, without the demands from popular organization, without the legitimate pressure put on the legislators. This is what we see now in regards to an immediate agrarian reform. If the people had merely watched the debates and waited for the government officials, they would still be involved with their debates over property rights, the upset of order, the anarchy of the economy and all the other arguments that allowed them to continue the unhuman and indefensible status quo. And we would have had more than a half a century of delays, debates and palliative measures. It is not this path which works for us.”

In a more positive vein, the Ligas Camponesas also published an article on abolition in Brazil that emphasized the Northeastern roots of abolition and focused on the municipality of Mossoró, Rio Grande do Norte.⁴¹⁹ On September 30, 1963, the people of Mossoró gathered to celebrate 80 years of abolition, since Mossoró passed an abolition measure five years before the Lei Aurea. *LIGA* published what they considered the “most important” events of the commemorations which included the inauguration of the Sindicato dos Ferroviários de Mossoró, in which a number of invited guests including Francisco Julião, gathered to celebrate and later joined in a game of football with the railroad workers, students and peasants.

The article continued, explaining the connection between the past and the present:

“The episode of Mossoró’s abolition functions, above all else, to fix the position of this land and of its people on the side of freedom and the equality of the rights of all men. The entire city, on this day, celebrates the passage of this anniversary, commemorating the truism passed in 1883, that was a noble page written in the history of this municipio.

The struggle of our forefathers who battled against the feudal society, against the slaveholders, the exploiters of slave labor, was a struggle without truces and was highly dignified, that shook

⁴¹⁹ “Mossoró – A primeira cidade brasileira a extripar a escravatura – comemorou festsivamente o 30 de setembro,” *LIGA* 23 October 1963, 5.

everyone's consciousness and united the citizens in a broad army against the slaveholders.

Over 80 years ago, when this city still did not have more than 3,000 inhabitants, those who administered the city, the leaders of the people, the government officials, could give a marvelous lesson to the entire country, declaring free all the blacks subjugated to slave labor.

It is interesting to note that already at that time, the notion of freedom pulsed in the hearts of men here. The idea that a society cannot be perfect nor Christian if it is based on the exploitation of some versus others, and the oppressive actions of the powerful against the humble already at this time lingered in the souls of Mossoroenses.

Today, Mossoró is more developed, clearly integrated in the modern struggle for the conquest of progress, and the romantic makings of its forefathers driven by those who became leaders in the abolitionist movement is still venerated with reason.

It is worthy of note that this small city of Mossoró with less than 3,000 inhabitants at that time, poor, lost in the immense Northeastern Brazil, let itself be dominated by those ideas that, for some time, had inspired the works of Castro Alves and that served as the base of the civic cries of Joaquim Nabuco, Lopes Trovão, and Eusébio de Queiroz.

The 30 of September shows that Mossoró arrived early to these ideas and here they quickly sprouted in fertile soil."

The use of Mossoró as a symbol of the struggle for abolition highlights the idea that abolition emerged from the Northeast as a struggle coming from the workers, students and rural people, instead of it being a law given to the slaves from Princess Isabel.

The Ligas also used the case of Mossoró to provide another example of how revolutionary change had come from the Northeast, preceding and leading the nation, as the Ligas hoped to do with the struggle for land reform. Governor Miguel Arraes, in a January 1964 speech in the Praça da República in Rio de Janeiro, declared, "Our struggle is a struggle for emancipation!"⁴²⁰ Arraes called for "national emancipation" from foreign imperialism and restated the need for agrarian reform. The Ligas, the PCB and Northeastern prominent politicians and intellectuals wove together the fight

⁴²⁰ "Arraes – Ano I," *Novos Rumos* 7-13 February 1964, 5.

for the abolition of slavery and the struggle for agrarian reform in Northeastern Brazil on various levels, but the question remains how this connected to the historical period of civil rights and third world liberation as well as to the dominant narrative of racial democracy.

Racial Democracy and Transnational Perspectives on Race Relations

The national Brazilian narrative of “racial democracy” has often been associated with Gilberto Freyre (*Casa-grande e senzala*, 1933). Freyre was from Pernambuco, an elected federal deputy in the 1946, and the founder (1949) and director of the Instituto Joaquim Nabuco de Pesquisas Sociais (IJNPS), where in the 1950s and 1960s, he led a number of seminars and courses on Northeastern Brazil and race relations. As director of the IJNPS, Freyre visited the UNESCO headquarters in 1951 and asked for the IJNPS to be a part of the studies on race relations, which was accepted immediately, with studies planned for Afro-Brazilian religions and culture in Pernambuco.⁴²¹ In addition, most foreigners who came to Pernambuco in the 1950s and 1960s met with Freyre during their visit or their stay since he was considered an expert on Northeastern Brazil, and considered a “non-political” or “objective” voice, even though this was not the case whatsoever. Freyre’s fame came from *Casa-grande e senzala*, in which he presented an argument about the mildness of the slave

⁴²¹ Marcos Chor Maio, “UNESCO and the Study of Race Relations in Brazil: Regional or National Issue?” *Latin American Research Review* 36, no.2 (2001): 131-134. As Marcos Chor Maio argued, the main importance of the UNESCO studies was that they reinforced the social science methodology for studying race relations in Brazil and they confirmed what many Brazilian activists and intellectuals had been claiming: Prejudice and discrimination against blacks existed in Brazil.

system in Brazil. He argued that modernization had led to the downfall of Brazil because of the disintegration of the patricarchal family and the protection of the slaves by the masters. The argument also drew upon the idea that the benevolent nature of Brazilian slavery allowed for a racial democracy – that is, a society not based on racial divisions – to emerge through miscegenation. So, how did this dominant narrative play out in the rural social movements and popular culture?

Judging from a number of examples of *literatura de cordel*, race and class shaped the popular poets' interpretations of systems of domination and resistance. A poem published in *LIGA* explicitly referred to race as a component of the struggles of the peasants against the large landowners. "The large landowner is kind with our wives!/ The other day he took charge of/ the son of Zé Pretinho/ that by way of some strange miracle/ was born very blond..."⁴²² The explicit reference to the power of the

⁴²² DENIS, "Pompilo Inferno," in *LIGA* 18 December 1963, 8 in Francisco Julião, ed., *Ligas Camponesas: Outubro 1962-Abril 1964* CIDOC Cuadernos, no. 27 (Cuernavaca, 1969): 454. The full poem is:

O inferno começa ali/Inferno de mortandade/maleita, fome e patrão/Inferno de eterna dívida/que jamais se acabará/pois, se acaso morre o pai/o filho trabalhará.
Em lugar nenhum do mundo/carne seca, chita e facão/valeram tanto dinheiro/e tamanha escravidão/É bem verdade que o padre/alivia o sofrimento/prometendo em troca diste/o céu como pagamento/Ele diz que também sofre/mas sofre um pouco melhor/O duro é sofrer no mato/sem pão, conforto e remédio/sofrer cortando seringa/sendo cupado sem tédio/sofrer dando o sangue à vista/pra dois grandes sugadores:/mosquito e seringalista.
Sofrer sabendo que o filho/vai crescer analfabeto/sofrer sabendo que o mesmo/está reservado ao reto. Isso, para não citar/os jagunços do patrão/sueuri, índio, enchente,/governo, banco, fiscal,/que nos tiram, secamente/o pouco que se ganhou/suando no seringal./De vez em quando o patrão/manda chamar Maria/ e faz uma prefeção/sobre a tal democracia./Pergunta se eu tenho andade/ com história de comunismo/e dizem em tom de ameaça/que isto é beira de abismo/Depois que Maria volta/ quase sempre traz presente/ não pra mim, para Joana/que mulher do Vicente./ O coronel é bondoso/ com as esposas da gente!/ Outra dia tomou conta/ do filho do Zé Pretinho/ que por um estranho milagre/ nasceu lourinho, lourinho.../mas somente a mulheril/ tem direito a regalia/ --homem nasceu para sofrer!/ ninguém lhe contraria./

large landowner in terms of sexual relations and race relations is relatively uncommon in literatura de cordel. Most scholars argue that the popular poetry reflects and supports the dominant narratives in erudite literature, but this poem suggests that the dominant narrative faced significant challenges. Likewise, the black figure in literatura de cordel often plays the role of the “bad” character, either violent and savage or a submissive slave, but in the case of this poem, the “black” character is the victim of exploitation who is urged to fight against the large landowner.⁴²³

Another way that the racialized dimension of the struggle for agrarian reform in Northeastern Brazil was raised was in relation to international anti-colonial

O doutor que é da cidade/ não pode imaginar/ o que é ser miserável/ viver morrendo de fome/ e morrer de trabalhar./ mas o pior de tudo isso/ é que a gente não tem tempo/ de assistir à Santa Missa/ como manda a religião/ e se morrer de repente/ vai purgar todos pecados/ pela vida divertida/ no calor do Fogo Eterno/ E começa outro Inferno...

⁴²³ Olga de Jesus Santos and Marilena Vianna, *O negro na literatura de cordel* (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Casa Rui Barbosa, 1989).

An example of the conservative popular poetry version of a racist version of the “negro” is in Poeta Seny’s “Porque é quem em 60 Negro vai virar Macaco,” a poet who regularly published anti-Ligas and anti-agrarian reform poetry: “Disse: o fogoió meu povo/ todos mi escutem um momento/ que vou dizer como o negro/teve origem e nascimento:/ duma onça e um gorilla/ por meio do cruzamento. Um gorila lá na Africa/ casou com um Canguçu,/ e nasceu uma família/ preta, da côr de urubú/ com as semelhanças de gente/ feios como um papangú... E o povo primitivo/ de lá daquele lugar/ domesticou esses bichos/ e lhe ensinou a falar.../ eis a origem dos negros/ como poudes se gerar...” (...) “negro tem mais um defeito/ que você falta saber.../ Negro não manda, vai, / negro dar e não promete/ meteu-lhe o braço ligeiro / com bem força to topete../ que o fogoió caiu tonto, / só aguentou um bofete. E logo que levantou-se/ quiz faser revolução/ porem o povo gritou/ O senhor não tem razão!/ e tiraram o fogoió/ de dentro da condução. E por causo desta greve / o povo rindo comenta../ brincando com a negrada/ os da pele mais cinzenta/ propaga que negro vai/ virar macaco em 60. Existe até negro tôlo/ que não suporta se dana, / se é preto fica cinzento/ e reponde esta chicana/ se negro virar macaco/ branco vai virar banana.” Poeta Seny, “Porque é quem em 60 Negro vai virar Macaco” (n.p., n.d.)

struggles, including the civil rights movement in the United States. One article on Angola in *LIGA* directly challenged Gilberto Freyre's studies on Africa and Portuguese colonialism as benevolent claiming that "Nem mesmo Gilberto Freire, com todo o seu sabejismo 'lusu-tropical' foi capaz de transformar em folclore inocente o oprobrio sistema de dominação (...) conservado por Salazar."⁴²⁴ Not only does this statement address the violence of the anti-colonial struggles, but it also challenges the use of folklore and folk culture as a way to read these struggles, and Gilberto Freyre's interpretations of anti-colonial struggles.

The Ligas Camponesas regularly published articles about the U.S. Civil Rights movement, using the struggle over Civil Rights as evidence of the false democracy of the United States, referring to the United States as the "Cortina de Dolar" (as opposed to the Cortina de Ferro, or Iron Curtain).⁴²⁵ One such article wondered how the US saw Brazilians given that most Brazilians have black blood in their veins, and to be black in the US meant being arrested for protesting peacefully and being forced to sit in the back of the buses, treated as inferiors or as animals.⁴²⁶ What is interesting is the Brazilian perspective of race that comes out in the article, in that it seems even more incredible to the author that blonde or light-skinned Americans who have traces of black blood are also subjected to segregation. The circumstances of James Meredith's graduation from the University of Mississippi

⁴²⁴ "Massacre em Angola Não Tem Fim" *LIGA* 27 November 1962, 6.

⁴²⁵ "Racismo nos EUA," (about Birmingham) *LIGA* 22 May 1963, 4; "Tres religiões defendem a integração racial," *LIGA* 7 August 1963, 4; Luta contra a discriminação racial," *LIGA* 28 August 1963, 4; Ayrton Alencar, "200 mil negros ocuparam Washington: Por liberdade e por democracia a 'Marcha da Vergonha,'" *LIGA* 4 September 1963, 6.

⁴²⁶ "Consciencia Revolucionária: Democracia, liberdade, sargentos," *LIGA* 15 May 1963, 2; Also, Eulália Vieira, "Consciencia Revolucionária," *LIGA* 22 May 1963, 2.

were interpreted as “American democracy being on the brink of civil war,” and the article called it embarrassing that machine guns and bayonets had to be held to allow a student to graduate from college.⁴²⁷ The Ligas also used this case to point out that the major newspapers in Brazil had not published anything about the incident, which supposedly showed that the Brazilian newspapers worked to preserve the “good name” of the United States.

The Ligas also tried to build solidarity between African-Americans, Cubans, Brazilians, and Africans.⁴²⁸ For instance, one article discussed the case of Robert Williams, an African American who fled to Cuba after the Revolution, because of political persecution in the United States. Williams was quoted as saying, “ ‘A mesma propaganda que procura ocultar ao nosso povo a verdade sobre Cuba é utilizada pelo Governo Americano para iludir os negros do meu Pais. (...) A propaganda oficial procura fazer crer aos americanos de cor que em todos os demais países os negros são tratados com discriminação e que são os EUA quem ainda os tratam melhor.’ ”⁴²⁹ The U.S. civil rights movement appeared to have been of great interest to the Ligas, with numerous reports about protests and racist politics in the U.S. South.

A 1961 film by documentary filmmaker Jean Manzon exemplifies an attempt of the U.S. government to counter the critique of racism in the U.S.. “Harmonia das Americas” (Harmony of the Americas, 1961) documented a tour through Brazil

⁴²⁷ Deraldo Lima, “O outro lado da história,” *LIGA* 16 October 1962, 3.

⁴²⁸ “Morre W.E.Burghardt DuBois, ideologo negro,” *LIGA* 21 September 1963, 2; “Africanos contra o racismo,” *LIGA* 21 September 1963, 3.

⁴²⁹ “Americanos (de Cuba) dispostos a morrer pela revolução,” *LIGA* 13 November 1962, 6.

sponsored the Brazil-U.S. Cultural Institute by the Howard University Choir.⁴³⁰ It is not clear where or when the film showed but it was in Portuguese. The tour and the film were clearly cultural propaganda to showcase African-Americans as U.S. cultural ambassadors to Latin America, and to show the similarities between African American and Brazilian culture. The fact that the trip occurred and the film was produced suggests that the U.S. government took the criticism of race relations seriously, and were making an effort in the early 1960s to establish a common view of the Americas as an area of racial mixing connected to Africa.

In September 1963, LIGA published Mao Tse-Tung's "message" to Black North Americans, and Mao's "Emancipation Proclamation for African Americans".⁴³¹ In a conference in Africa, Mao asked all the people of the world to unite against racial discrimination and North American imperialism. Mao said that the nineteen million blacks in the U.S. still lived in a system of slavery, oppression and discrimination. According to Mao, the violence of the Klu Klux Klan and lynchings showed the true nature of US democracy, but in the past few years, black North Americans had started to fight for their freedom and rights. The declaration discussed the protests and legal measures to end segregation policies. It ended with a call for solidarity, "Exorto aos operários, camponeses, intelectuais, revolucionários, elementos burgueses sensatos e outras pessoas sensatas de todas as cores no mundo, brancos, negros, amarelos, mestiços, etc., a unir-se contra a discriminação racial. (...) Estou profundamente

⁴³⁰ U.S. Information Agency. Jean Manzon, "Harmony in the Americas," 1961. 306.3605. National Archives.

⁴³¹ "Negros norte-americanos lutam: Mensagem de Mao Tse Tung," *LIGA* 21 September 1963, 3; "A proclamação de emancipação dos Afro-Americanos, de Mao Tse Tung," *LIGA* 21 September 1963, 3.

convencido de que contando com o apoio de mais de 90 por cento dos habitantes do mundo inteiro, a luta justa dos negros norte-americanos se enroara de certo com a vitória. O malvado sistema colonialista e imperialista que florescia com a escravidão e o tráfico de negros também desapareceria com a emancipação da racismo!” The Emancipation Proclamation referred to Abraham Lincoln, but put “North American racism” in a broader context, labeling it a “threat to the entire world.” “For the racists of the U.S., a person of color is worth less than a mongrel dog and this is the justice of the country that has proclaimed itself the savior of the world.”

Regular reports appeared on African independence struggles, with a special focus placed on Angola.⁴³² Oftentimes the articles made a direct comparison between independence struggles in Angola and the struggle of the Ligas for radical agrarian reform.⁴³³ LIGA published poetry and literature from Angola, including works by Agostinho Neto and Manuel Lima, and Viriato da Cruz Makèzú, that dealt with topics such as slavery, imperialism and racism.⁴³⁴

Figure 2

Cartoon in *LIGA* 6 November 1963, p.6

⁴³² “Imprensa Popular,” *LIGA* 20 November 1962, 5; “Massacre em Angola Não Tem Fim” *LIGA* 27 November 1962, 6; Heliodoro Albuquerque, “Do Ponto de Vista Operário: Lumumba,” *LIGA* 13 March 1963, 2; “Argélia: Exemplo de revolução nacionalista,” *LIGA* 13 March 1963, 5 (about the significance of Algerian independence for Angola); “Voz da África: África 1962,” *LIGA* 22 May 1963, 4; “Congo dará ajuda aos nacionalistas angolanos,” *LIGA* 14 August 1963, 4; “Nacionalistas angolanos em conferencia,” *LIGA* 14 August 1963, 4; Andrade Lima, “Manobras do colonialismo português,” *LIGA* 4 September 1963, 4; “Nkrumah, Selaissié e win manifestam-se sobre a conferencia de chefes de estado,” *LIGA* 15 October 1963, 2.

⁴³³ “Influencia camponesa na revolução angolana,” *LIGA* 23 January 1963, 3; Andrade Lima, “Voz da África: ‘Olho por olho,’” *LIGA* 19 June 1963, 4.

⁴³⁴ Andrade Lima and Kamoço, “Poetas angolanos lutam pela independencia,” *LIGA* 6 November 1963, 3.

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

And, as mentioned earlier, many of the Leftist newspapers frequently analyzed anti-colonial/anti-imperialist struggles of the Cold War in terms of the metaphor of slavery. Third World activists found the metaphor readily available to discuss Third World independence movements, portaying the threat of the Third World being enslaved either by the US or by Russia. For instance, one article in *A Hora* (PCB) described the Interamerican Conference at Punta del Este, Uruguay,” as an attempt by the United States to use its power to enslave the people of the Third World. “Mais uma vez, os imperialistas norte-americanos tentam derrubar o regime socialista de Cuba. Tentam transformar a ‘pérola das Antilhas,’ onde o povo se encontra no poder, graças a Revolução, numa colônia submissa ao seu Departamento de Estado, isto é, submissa aos anseios de dominação e escravização dos povos livres.”⁴³⁵ Leftist groups in Brazil interpreted the actions of the US government in Cuba as the US attempt to enslave the Third World.⁴³⁶ But, Russia and communism

⁴³⁵ “Escravos, não” *A Hora* 27 January – 3 February 1962, 3.

⁴³⁶ Since Cuba was a spotlight of international relations during the Cold War in the early 1960s, the anti-American protests strengthened by US actions in Cuba are perhaps another way to understand the reasons behind some of the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations’ policies of covert actions. It is possible that the US government understood US actions in Cuba as creating a broader base of support for

were also seen as a threat to Third World independence, a discourse of the Cold War coming from the Third World but intricately connected to the US-Soviet relations. Numerous references were made about the slavery of communist societies in the mainstream press, editorials, and in conservative literatura de cordel. For example, one popular poem, “Reforma Agrária e o Comunismo,” explained that in Russia, “They are forced to work/ and no one has freedom/ they don’t even have control over themselves/ they don’t do what they want to do/ those who say that equality exists are lying.”⁴³⁷ The poem insists that communism enslaved people, and urges the audience not to believe the “lies” that communist societies are more egalitarian, allowing poor peasants to go to school, eat, and have access to social services such as health care. This shows how both the left and the right, or both the anti-American and anti-Russian political activists, used the metaphor of slavery as a political tool to express the need for Third World independence during the Cold War.

Representations of Quilombos in Popular Culture

While much of the political discourse discussed slavery and abolition without specifically engaging with race relations or blackness, representations of such narratives in films cast Afro-Brazilian actors and implemented other tools to mark the

Leftist groups in Latin America and the Third World, a threat to US hegemony that the US government could not risk for fear of other Cubas.

⁴³⁷ Mark J. Curran, *História do Brasil em cordel* (São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 1988), 168-169. Curran writes that folhetos such as *História da Reforma Agrária e o Comunismo* were funded and sometimes completely created by “pseudopoet” propagandists of the right.

narrative as African or black. Two important films to the Cinema Novo movement approached the theme of quilombos in Northeastern Brazil, albeit with extremely different techniques and objectives, and both films expressed an escape from slavery – a resistance to slave society from slaves themselves. Linduarte Noronha's *Aruanda*, a semi-documentary on a quilombo community in the hills of Paraíba, was released in 1959. Carlos Diegues's *Ganga Zumba*, a feature film focused on fugitive slaves in the seventeenth century, came out only a few weeks before the military coup. In addition to these films, the cultural group associated with the CPC, Opinião, created two theater productions "Arena conta Zumbi" and "Liberdade, Liberdade" in 1965. As cultural critic Jean-Claude Bernadet claimed in 1967, these cultural productions focused on Palmares because it was a symbol of "liberdade" or freedom.⁴³⁸

Before turning to an analysis of these productions, it is necessary to consider why runaway slaves became the prevailing image of the historical legacy of slavery in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Brazilian film. In line with Davarian Baldwin and Tim Lake, whose work focuses on the connection between the media and the Black Panther Party, can we, or should we read the representations of run-away slaves as part of the "performance" of revolution?⁴³⁹ By analyzing the representations found in *Aruanda* and *Ganga Zumba* and the reviews of these films, it is possible to see another version of the "Nordestino," in some ways different from

⁴³⁸ Jean-Claude Bernadet, *Brasil em tempo de cinema* (Rio: Civilização Brasileira, 1967): 19-21.

⁴³⁹ Davarian L. Baldwin, "'Culture is a Weapon in Our Struggle for Liberation': The Black Panther Party and the Cultural Politics of Decolonization" and Tim Lake, "The Arm(ing) of the Vanguard, Signify(ing), and Performing the Revolution: The Black Panther Party and Pedagogical Strategies for Interpreting a Revolutionary Life," in *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement* eds., Jama Lezerow and Yohuru Williams (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

that of the poor peasant or the sertanejo. The films emphasize blackness by tying the characters to what is portrayed as “African” or “Afro-Brazilian” culture, yet this “African-ness” holds multiple meanings, especially when placed in the historical context of the 1960s, when the films were made. While some have argued that the African connection was a form of resistance in that it challenged previous interpretations that emphasized the European nature of slave society in Brazil, at the same time, the portrayal of certain characteristics considered “African” also reinforces certain stereotypes of blackness in the Northeast.

Paraíba journalist Linduarte Noronha’s *Aruanda* appeared in theaters in 1960, sparking debates in the Brazilian cinema world and a wide variety of critiques. The documentary starts with a historical reenactment of a slave who seizes his liberty by fleeing with his family to the mountains of Serra do Talhado in the Paraíba sertão (Santa Luzia de Sabugi), forming a community of runaway slaves. The twenty-minute documentary shifts from the historical dramatization of a family walking to the hills to a scene of women making pots out of clay by hand and firing them in a rustic kiln. The community then loads the pots on the backs of burros to sell at the weekly market (feira) and the documentary ends at the end of the market day with the community leaving for their home.

The film is about this “marginalized” community of descendants of runaway slaves and their daily lives, depicted as isolated, non-modern and poor. The point of the film is to show, as one reviewer wrote, “o grupo distante e isolado da Serra do Talhado deixou de ser escravo pela Lei Áurea, mas caiu imediatamente no grilhão

escravista da situação econômica negligente da região.”⁴⁴⁰ According the cameraman, Rucker Vieira, in 1960, the entire population of the community was black, all descendents of slaves.⁴⁴¹ According to most of the reviewers and cultural critics, the poor production quality – editing jumps, natural lighting with high contrasts, direct sound, hand-held camera technique – helped to emphasize the theme of regional underdevelopment, poverty and “authenticity.”

One review criticized Noronha for not choosing to film the community during the October festival of Rosário, which would have shown its “typically Afro-Brazilian” culture.⁴⁴² Noronha certainly knew this aspect of the story since he had written a lengthy newspaper report on the festival of Rosário in 1958, but he chose to portray a different version of community life.⁴⁴³ Instead of showing Zê Bento as “more vibrant, agile and dancing, clapping his hands to the rhythm of the zabumba,” Noronha chose to make a “slower” film, using the music of an old flautist (pífano) and the cocô, as he said, depicting “outra modalidade africano no nosso folklore musical, já raro.”⁴⁴⁴ As Noronha claimed in a 1961 interview, by using the local music, “o filme colaborava inclusive como documento nacional sobre a arte regional

⁴⁴⁰ Elísio Valverde, “Um documentário importante: Aruanda; duas cine-reportagens: Ouro Preto e Diamantina,” *Revista de Cultura Cinematográfica* 4, no.21 (May 1961): 51-54.

⁴⁴¹ Interview with Rucker Vieira. José Marinho de Oliveira, Depoimentos Cinema Brasileiro, tema Nordeste. Cópia de trabalho, orientação de Maria Rita Galvão. D22515. Cinemateca Brasileira, São Paulo, ECA/USP, s.d., 5.

⁴⁴² J. Fernandes Dantes, “ ‘Aruanda’ de Linduarte” 04430. MAM Archives. Rio de Janeiro.

⁴⁴³ Interview with Linduarte Noronha. José Marinho de Oliveira, Depoimentos Cinema Brasileiro, tema Nordeste. Cópia de trabalho, orientação de Maria Rita Galvão. D22417. Cinemateca Brasileira, São Paulo, ECA/USP, s.d., 8.

⁴⁴⁴ Letter from Linduarte Noronha to Maurice Capovilla. Folder: Aruanda. FUNARTE Archives. Rio de Janeiro.

à mesma miséria quer servia ao tema do nosso empreendimento fílmico.”⁴⁴⁵ In other words, Noronha saw the film as portraying the misery and poverty of both Nordeste rural communities and filmmakers, constructing regional identity that was not simply a documentation of rural folk culture, but more importantly, a political statement about Northeastern poverty that ran through all levels of society, from rural workers to filmmakers and intellectuals.

Noronha had a tightly written script for the documentary, and commented on his use of non-professional actors, again suggesting how *Aruanda* is a documentary that is also fiction. It is a documentary, sometimes described as an ethnographic film, and yet it is a historical reenactment that also followed Noronha’s script. Noronha used non-professional actors to interpret roles supposedly of real people. The character of Zê Bento, interpreted by Paulino Carneiro, was described by Noronha: “Paulino Carnero é analfabeto total, porém homem de uma sensibilidade fora do comum para os de sua condição. Jamais recia compreender amplamente a sua colaboração. Aliás, o ator não-profissional é muito mais produtivo. Ele obedece subservientemente. E isto é importantíssimo para o diretor criador no cinema.”⁴⁴⁶

According to one review, the character of Zê Bento symbolized “o homem congenitalmente infeliz, descarrilhado, porque sobre uma estrutura sócio-econômico disforme. Zê Bento e família (mulher, filhinho pançudo e nú e o gegue) emergidos de um passado próximo opressivo, a escravidão, tentando a emancipação no tópo da

⁴⁴⁵ Linduarte Noronha a Elísio Valverde, “Desfeita a Utopia na Paraíba,” *Revista de Cultura Cinematográfica* 4, no.24 (August 1961): 38-42.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

Serra do Talhado.”⁴⁴⁷ Yet, as both Noronha and Vieira described, the community was skeptical of being on film, and even thought that the filmmakers were working for the military and were in Serra do Talhado to enlist the community members.⁴⁴⁸

Perhaps one of the most revealing aspects of the film *Aruanda* was the influence it had on the Cinema Novistas and the perceptions of Northeastern filmmakers with regard to rural Northeastern society. If we consider the way that Noronha spoke about his vision of *Aruanda* and of its subject and the non-professional actors, it becomes clear that he was portraying his version of Northeastern Brazil and of African-Brazilian culture. This version depicted the historical legacy of slavery and connected the history to the struggles of the 1960s for Third World independence. Instead of making it an “African” film, as Glauber Rocha claimed he tried to do with *Barravento*, Noronha portrayed a runaway slave community as “typical” of rural Northeastern communities: isolated, poor, neglected and non-modern. The narrative of the quilombo represented an enduring struggle that continued to oppress contemporary community members, reinforcing the static narrative that forms a key component of regional identity.

By the end of the 1950s, the scholarly literature on the seventeenth century quilombo of Palmares⁴⁴⁹ began to reflect the rise in Leftist social movements and

⁴⁴⁷ Elísio Valverde, “Um documentário importante: *Aruanda*; duas cine-reportagens: Ouro Preto e Diamantina,” *Revista de Cultura Cinematográfica* 4, no.21 (May 1961): 51-54.

⁴⁴⁸ Interview with Rucker Vieira. José Marinho de Oliveira, Depoimentos Cinema Brasileiro, tema Nordeste. Cópia de trabalho, orientação de Maria Rita Galvão. D22515. Cinemateca Brasileira, São Paulo, ECA/USP, s.d., 4.

⁴⁴⁹ Palmares was the largest quilombo in Brazil. It was located in the *Serra da Barriga*, in the mountains that are in the present-day state of Alagoas in Northeast Brazil. Sugarcane plantations and processing mills have always dominated the

resistance in Brazil at that time. Many of the studies focused on the Marxist interpretation of resistance as class struggle, placing Palmares and quilombos in this context. Clovis Moura, for instance, attacked Gilberto Freyre's idea of "benevolent" slavery in Brazil by defining Palmares as a black resistance movement that created a separate and free alternative society to slavery.⁴⁵⁰ For example, the Communist Party newspaper, *Novos Rumos*, reprinted in 1964 a political manifesto from 1919 in which the Grupo Comunista Brasileiro Zumbi used Palmares as a symbol of resistance against the Republic and global capitalism.⁴⁵¹ Film critics described *Ganga Zumba* –

economy and the landscape of the *mata*, or fertile coastal region in this area and was a major factor in the establishment and destruction of Palmares. Although many of the stories differ, it is possible to estimate that Palmares began around the 1600s and lasted until a well-armed group of slave catchers led by Domingos Jorge Velho destroyed the quilombo and killed the inhabitants in 1694. Many accounts exist but the leader was known as Zumbi or Zambi.

⁴⁵⁰ João José Reis and Flávio dos Santos Gomes, *Liberdade por um fio: história dos quilombos no Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia Das Letras, 1996), 12-13. Other authors with this perspective include Edison Carneiro, Aderbal Jurema, Luís Luna, José Alípio Goulart and Décio Freitas.

⁴⁵¹ The Communist Party published a manifesto from the PCB, first written in 1919, about the Grupo Comunista Brasileiro 'Zumbi,' "Manifesto de Lançamento do Grupo Zumbi," *Novos Rumos* 21 – 27 February 1964, 5.

Do you love this land where you were born? Do you wish that it takes its place alongside other countries in the aura that has started to dawn on humanity? Do you want a grandiose Brazil without masters and without slaves? □

Do you want to contribute to our moral support for fighting against that evils that make us unhappy, that degrade us, such as illiteracy, politics, alcoholism, prostitution? Do you believe as we do that in Brazil, as in the world, all hope is not completely lost? Do you believe in a more beautiful future? A dignified life that can be lived? □

Then join us immediately as a member of the Grupo Comunista Brasileiro 'Zumbi.' □

This is the name of the admirable black Spartacus of our history, that united around himself a group of rebel slaves and formed the Republic of Palmares. □ □ □

His name will be the flag of those who rebel against the yoke of the political, clerical and industrial syndicate, in the claws of which our loved Brazil is caught. □

a film based on the history of Palmares – as a form of resistance against the dominant narrative of Brazilian history based on ideas of racial democracy. The film and reviews of Carlos Diegues's *Ganga Zumba* reveal the interpretations and debates over how Palmares was appropriated as a symbol in the 1960s.

Carlos Diegues's *Ganga Zumba* is a story of slaves who decide to flee to Palmares after seeing a slave woman, the mother of the central character Antão, strapped to a pole and whipped to death. Antão discovers that he is the grandson of Ganga Zumba, the famous leader of the quilombo. Antão, Aroroba and Cipriani escape from the sugarcane plantation. On the way they encounter a white master and his wife whom they must kill, and Dandara, another slave woman, is forced to join the group. Eventually, the *capitães-do-mato* find the runaways and Aroroba is mortally wounded. The group makes it to the *Serra da Barriga*, but the *capitães-do-mato* catch them again. Aroroba is killed and the group is captured, but then saved by the Palmarinos who descend from the hills to come to the rescue.

This Cinema Novo film uses the filming techniques of hand-held camera shots, static camera shots and natural lighting to express the reality of the subject.

Shortly, we will affiliate ourselves with the Grupo Clarte of Paris. And the Brazilians will be able to collaborate with intellectuals throughout the world in creating a Universal Republic, without which there is no salvation for the people of the world.□

Against the republican dictatorship, against the rule of the bourgeoisie above all the other classes, against the cult of the incompetent, against the organized exploitation, against the official lies.□

For the free man who lives on free land, for the emancipation of the women, for the cult of the child who is tomorrow's man, for the abolition of class privilege, for the order originating from a mutual agreement between men for the Universal Republic where everyone has where everyone has the right to live.□

We hope to have members throughout Brazil. We are already organizing groups in every city of the republic.

But, unlike other Cinema Novo productions that focused on the “realistic” environment, Diegues shot the film in Campos. The filming techniques, as well as the opening scene that shows pictures of slavery with a voice-over describing the horrors of human bondage, demonstrate a quasi-documentary style characteristic of Cinema Novo films. The film strives to engage the audience politically, as a cinema of praxis, which will invoke transformation and revolution. As Robert Stam argues, the film “deserves praise for its uncompromising portrait of Brazilian slavery. Enslaved Africans are whipped, raped, murdered, and forced to work to the point of exhaustion, a picture that refutes the Freyrean notion of a more gentle, charitable form of Lusitanian servitude.”⁴⁵² But, at the same time, certain stereotypes – of what is considered “African” – inform the image of the black Nordeste rebel.

The very first scene of the film is perhaps most representative of the rejection of Gilberto Freyre’s explanation of benevolent slavery in the Brazilian household.⁴⁵³ After the old paintings/etchings of the sugar industry and slaves, Diegues cuts to a scene at night where the camera is held static on an almost naked black woman on her knees, slouched in front of a pole with her arms tied around the pole. She has been whipped to death. A group of slaves approach her, first in silence, then they start singing, “*chora papai, chora mamai*” to an African drumbeat, a song that is sung throughout the film. Diegues then cuts to the *casa-grande* where the masters look at the spectacle from a distance, then Diegues does a series of close-up shots on the

⁴⁵² Robert Stam, *Tropical Multiculturalism: A Comparative History of Race in Brazilian Cinema and Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 228. Also, see E Bradford Burns, “History in the Brazilian Cinema,” *Luso-Brazilian Review* 14, no.1 (Summer 1977): 49-59.

⁴⁵³ Freyre, *The Masters*, 369. Freyre wrote a great deal on the cordial and familial relations between the house slaves and the masters.

slaves' faces. The group of slaves exits and the camera focuses uncomfortably on the dead woman. The house slave who had been standing next to the master in the shot of the casa-grande enters the frame with the dead woman, kneels, and begins humming the same tune. The camera stays fixed on this scene as the film credits roll to the side of the two women. This sequence is an uncomfortable and politically powerful opening sequence to the film.

While *Ganga Zumba* opens with the pain and horror of slavery, this is not the focus of the film. In an interview in the *Diario de Notícias*, Diegues explained his intentions in making this film: “*Ganga Zumba* deve ser compreendido em duas perspectivas fundamentais. A primeira, de caráter ideológico revela sua idéia central: a liberdade, a luta por ela, sua utilidade, etc. A segunda, o fato de ser este filme a tentativa de realizar uma fábula negra.”⁴⁵⁴ Diegues further explains that he was interested in showing what it means to be truly free and the importance of struggle. Antão supposedly represents this idea in that he is not interested only in being free but he knows that it is necessary to be free to love and to live. Often in counter-position with the masters, the strength of the slaves becomes obvious. While cutting cane, the number of slaves and their physical strength makes the relatively small overseer seem ridiculous in his attempts to control and whip the slaves. Whenever slaves meet up with white people in the film, they are in a position to overpower them. This violence was described by Diegues as the central component to the film because the “fundamental tripod of the black spirit is sex, rhythm, and poetry,” which

⁴⁵⁴ “Carlos Diegues fala sobre “Ganga Zumba,” *Diario de Notícias*. Folder: Ganga Zumba. MAM Archives. Rio de Janeiro.

describes Diegues's second objective: of making a black fable.⁴⁵⁵ This *fabula negra* marked the rebel slaves in numerous ways throughout the film: as "African" through the importance of drumming to the story, through characters who appeared to be fortune tellers, and through the insipid love story presented as a threat to their escape.

In some aspects, this *Ganga Zumba* is a "road movie" or at least a journey to attaining *conscientização*. In the beginning, Antão denies the existence of Palmares, and skeptically declares, "*O branco algum dia acaba com Palmares.*" When the group decides to escape, he lures the overseer away from the casa-grande through Cipriani's sexual powers and kills him, ripping out his heart and starting his journey on the road and toward freedom. On the trip as the drumbeat from Palmares gets louder, Antão becomes more and more committed to the idea of freedom. Dandara joins Antão on this journey to become *conscientizada*. At first she believes that "*preto é preto, branco é branco, preto sempre é escravo de branco.*" It is important to Antão that she joins them, and he tells her that when they get to Palmares he will be the king and he hopes that she will stay with him. After the group crosses the river and Aroroba is wounded, they seem to lose hope momentarily. But, they are very close to Palmares and Antão is fully realizing the meaning of freedom. He shouts, "Adianta! Têm que lutar muito! Lutar! Muito homem que não quer ser bicho. Tem que fazer alguma coisa!" And, the film ends at this point, before Antão arrives in Palmares, announcing a call for armed struggle that ends without the characters truly arriving to their final destination.

⁴⁵⁵ Tati Morães, "'Ganga Zumba' quer dizer Zumbi (dos Palmares) e liberdade..." *Ultima Hora*, (Rio) 29 August 1963. Folder: Ganga Zumba. MAM Archives. Rio de Janeiro.

The film was released a few weeks prior to the 1964 coup, and provoked a great deal of criticism in the film reviews. A number of the reviewers criticized the political messages in the film because of the depictions of resistance, violence and race relations. Critic Paulo Perdigão strongly criticized the “fábula negra sobre a liberdade,” saying that the film had technical flaws and that it showed Diegues’s inexperience as a filmmaker.⁴⁵⁶ Perdigão claimed the film was racist in that it showed all whites as villains and slave owners and blacks as the oppressed heroes. Luiz Alberto claimed it was a disappointing film in that the final solution is a battle between blacks and whites, a fight for freedom by the blacks against the whites, instead of a fight of the exploited against the oppressors.⁴⁵⁷ And while this was how these film critics analyzed the theme of race relations, the film itself provides a more nuanced perspective, vilifying the system of exploitation more than the actual characters who operate within this structure.

Claudio Mello e Souza claimed that the poetics of the film had been lost in its attempt to rationalize a political problem.⁴⁵⁸ He found the argument unpersuasive and claimed that it is impossible to convince someone to fight for individual and collective freedom simply with shouts of, “é preciso fazer alguma coisa” and “não podemos mais continuar assim.” Mello e Souza argued that “A aventura dos negros de então e a situação do operariado e do campesinato de hoje – entre os quais Carlos

⁴⁵⁶ Paulo Perdigão, “Ganga Zumba, Rei dos Palmares,” *Diario de Notícias*, 10 March 1964. Folder: Ganga Zumba. MAM Archives. Rio de Janeiro.

⁴⁵⁷ Luiz Alberto, “Ganga Zumba,” *Jornal do Comercio* (Rio) 20 March 1964. Folder: Ganga Zumba. MAM Archives. Rio de Janeiro.

⁴⁵⁸ Claudio Mello e Souza, “Ganga Zumba: O problema é a guerra,” *Jornal do Brasil* 12 March 1964. Folder: Ganga Zumba. MAM Archives. Rio de Janeiro.

Diegues pretendeu estabelecer traços reivindicatórios comuns – colocarm-se, ao meu ver, num plano epopéico que *Ganga Zumba* está bem longe de atingir.”⁴⁵⁹

Cultural critic Jean-Claude Bernardet also declared the film to be an “idealistic aspiration, purely theoretical and utopic.”⁴⁶⁰ In Bernardet’s 1967 analysis, he argued that it was completely out of touch with the majority of films produced in this era in Brazil because it was the only film in which the problems of the “povo revoltado” were not resolved by a leader who spoke to the people and the dominant classes, and had nothing to do with a leader who was a part of the community or who was interacting with the state and legal institutions. As Bernardet claims, “Palmares is a rupture with the colonial world of the fazendeiros. It is a different social organization that forms itself as parallel to the colonial world, but does not have any understanding, any fit, any conciliation with the world of the fazendeiros.”⁴⁶¹ Bernardet claimed that the film focused on the establishment of a new leader in a new type of society, apparently completely separate from mainstream society, in what Bernardet described as an entirely “mystic,” apolitical idea of community formation. For this reason, he labeled it an idealistic film, especially when, according to Bernardet, it was read in the political context of the era (March 1964).

The Cineclube interpretation of the film, published after 1964, exemplifies the Leftist interpretation of *Ganga Zumba*, emphasizing the theme of slave resistance against the colonial exploitation of the Portuguese. The pamphlet quoted Diegues’s idea of history: “Os homens são vítimas de sua própria história, até que cada um

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰ Jean-Claude Bernardet, *Brasil em tempo de cinema* (Rio: Civilização Brasileira, 1967): 59.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., 58.

mude seu destino. *Ganga Zumba* é um filme simples e vivo, um verdadeiro filme de aventuras. A violência que aparece é uma consequência natural da opressão. A violência prepara então a chegada da justiça.” The cineclube pamphlet reprinted foreign reviews of *Ganga Zumba* that described the film as showing how “ideas of freedom sing through the tropical night, a diverse resistance that organizes itself in spite of torture. Black Brazil knows its first guerrilla leader, Zambi, and its first land, Palmares.” According to a 1968 report on the reception of *Ganga Zumba* in Paris in 1968, the film provoked debates in the forum of the group Jeunne Afrique that had gathered to discuss racial problems, and Diegues lectures attracted a diverse group including Prince Rainier and Princess Grace, Jean-Paul Sartre, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Edgar Morin, Roger Bastide, and Celso Furtado.⁴⁶²

Most analyses of *Aruanda* and *Ganga Zumba* focus on how these films influenced the Cinema Novo movement or on the representations of blackness in film. When read in the historical context of the struggle for land in Northeastern Brazil, the films acquire a different meaning because the representations of slaves, the fight for abolition and quilombos formed part of a broader metaphor used by the rural social movements to challenge the dominant historical narrative. What this analysis of the representations of slavery, abolition and quilombos has shown is the power that these historical narratives held, especially for those groups that supported efforts for agrarian reform. The use of the historical symbols challenged the legitimacy of the violence associated with the latifundio system and the police, and in some instances, legitimized the use of violence by the social movements themselves. Social

⁴⁶² Celina Luz, “Ganga Zumba conquista Paris,” 4 January 1968. Folder: *Ganga Zumba*. MAM Archives. Rio de Janeiro.

movements drew connections to African independence movements and other struggles by African diaspora communities involved in struggles for rights and freedom. And, a fluid racialized narrative implicitly and explicitly depicted the landowners as “white” and the peasants as “non-white,” attaching new meanings to these racial classifications.

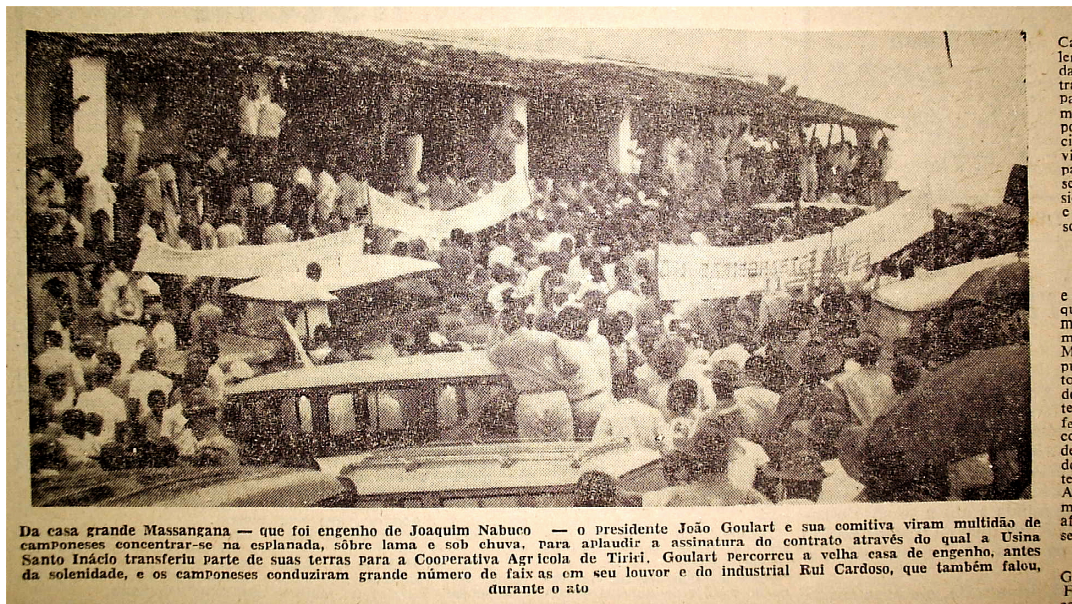
At the same time, none of the rural social movements moved to create a specifically “black” movement or identity. In fact, many of the references to Nordestinos as slaves drew a contrast between Nordeste slavery and what they called “black slavery.” This may be related to entrenched racialized understandings in the countryside and in the Northeast that would have narrowed popular support for the movements. If “race” and the process of Othering in Brazil shifts from the Other being “black” to the Other being “rural” and “Nordestino,” then the power of the symbol of slavery shows how and why the rural social movements used this symbol to denounce oppression and exploitation of Nordestinos. While the narrative was racialized, it helped to form an identity of the Nordeste, to create a “consciousness” of the exploitation seen to afflict this ethnic/regional group. And this in itself challenged the dominant national and international narrative of Brazilian race relations, threatening the long-standing assumptions that dehumanized Nordestinos and legitimized their exploitation. But, as the concluding section of this chapter illustrates, these newly formed narratives and the political struggle for land in Northeastern Brazil faced strong opposition following the 1964 coup. While the story of the Engenho Massangana is only one example, it reflects the shift in the politics of agrarian reform that occurred during the dictatorship and the views on rural workers.

Only a few years after the coup, it was as if the memory of the rural social activism in the Northeast had been erased. Once celebrated as the jewel of national agrarian reform by President João Goulart, the 1967 narrative focused on the failure of the agrarian cooperative by placing the blame on the workers, their lack of solidarity, and their incapacity to understand the cooperative system instead of on the policies that had slowly been eroding the financial feasibility of the cooperative project.

The Case of the Engenho Massangana

Figure 3

Photograph: “Da Casa-Grande Massangana,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 31 July 1963, p.3.



The above picture appeared in the *Diario de Pernambuco* on 31 July 1963, depicting the celebration of the expropriation of the Engenho Massangana, the engenho of abolitionist Joaquim Nabuco. President João Goulart, accompanied by Miguel Arraes and Celso Furtado, spoke in front of the Casa Grande of the Engenho Massangana in the inaugural ceremony that turned the five engenhos of the Usina Santa Inácio into the Agrarian Cooperative of Tiriri.⁴⁶³ According to an editorial in the *Diario de Pernambuco* on 31 July 1963, the proposed cooperative went back to the historical roots of sugar cane production in Pernambuco, “uma coletivização orginal,” first introduced in 1549, that allowed the cane workers to grow their own cane and process it in the local usina. The pilot project of Tiriri, financed by the State government and

⁴⁶³ “Jango presidiu entrega de terras aos camponeses da cooperativa de Tirirí,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 31 July 1963, 3.

SUDENE, would provide credit and technical assistance to the Cooperative with hopes of creating a more lucrative situation for the cane workers by removing the large landowner from the production process. A month after the celebration, the cooperative had 3,500 peasants as members on the five engenhos that totaled 6,000 hectares of land. Tiriri was declared the “great test” that could bring triumph to the agrarian problems of the Northeast.⁴⁶⁴ The Ligas published an article declaring the cooperative a sign that the “latifundio has its days numbered.”⁴⁶⁵

At the ceremony, João Francisco, President of the Liga Camponesa do Cabo, met and spoke with President Goulart. He was described as smiling because as a 48-year-old man, he had worked “for 34 years for the latifundiários without having any power, or even being able to approach those with power, and now he could hardly believe he was standing in front of the President of the Republic.” João Francisco talked about the history of the Ligas in Cabo and said that the workers appreciated when Padre Melo took over the organization of the Liga.⁴⁶⁶ Emphasizing the violence of the latifundio system, João Francisco pointed to a young boy and told the story of the boy’s father who had been killed for stealing a few coconuts from a tree.

What is notable about this case is that the reference to abolition was not simply a coincidence, but a political statement that compared agrarian reform to

⁴⁶⁴ “Jango presidiu entrega de terras aos camponeses da cooperativa de Tirirí,” *Diário de Pernambuco* 31 July 1963, 3.

⁴⁶⁵ “Latifundiários em desespero fazem sua ‘Reforma Agrária,’” *LIGA* 12 June 1963, 4.

⁴⁶⁶ “A cooperativa de Tiriri,” *Diário de Pernambuco* 31 July 1963. Melo was later quoted as having said: “A organização será, aqui, uma triplice força. O usineiro dará a terra. O camponês, o trabalho. O Governo dará a técnica. Onde houver o latifundio, o cooperativismo diminuirá as tensões sociais; onde houver minifundio, desviará a mão de obra para atividades correlates e permitirá a reorganização da exploração da terra.” Costa Porto, “Tiriri,” *Diário de Pernambuco* 14 June 1964, 2.

abolition in Northeastern Brazil. Supposedly, João Goulart was profoundly moved by being the “first President to have spoken directly with a peasant.” From the Engenho Massangana in the Northeast, Goulart declared national support for agrarian reform, stating, “O que a nação precisar era realmente de uma reforma que beneficiasse todo o Brasil rural, para aproveitamento do vasto solo nacional no desenvolvimento e progresso do país.”⁴⁶⁷ The new administrator of the Usina, Rui Cardoso, presented the Casa Grande of Engenho Massangana with a bronze plaque with the inscription: “Nas terras de massapê do velho Engenho Massangana, onde Joaquim Nabuco viveu a infância e inspirou-se para a campanha libertária dos escravos, realizou-se hoje, um século depois, a campanha libertária de terras sob a inspiração do presidente João Goulart, através da SUDENE e do entendimento cristão e democrático dos trabalhadores rurais e dos proprietários deste engenho.” The symbolic reference of the creation of the cooperative explicitly compared agrarian reform to the abolition of slavery, nine months before the military coup. But then, the “triumphant” story took a different twist.

In June of 1964, a few months after the coup, the *Diario de Pernambuco* published a number of reports on the Cooperative of Tirirí, stating that less than a year after its inauguration, the cooperative faced serious financial problems. By the end of June, the workers had decided to go on strike after not receiving pay for more than three weeks.⁴⁶⁸ According to Padre Melo, the Banco do Brasil was not giving the cooperative the financial credit that was given to any other landowner in the

⁴⁶⁷ “Jango presidiu entrega de terras aos camponeses da cooperativa de Tirirí,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 31 July 1963, 3.

⁴⁶⁸ “Ainda Tirirí,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 23 June 1963, 4.

region. While President Castelo Branco spoke in support of the cooperativist movement, Melo claimed that he did nothing to help with the bureaucratic problems in releasing credit for the cooperative.⁴⁶⁹ In addition to this problem, Padre Melo expressed concern about the directors of the cooperative and their understanding of the cooperative system. The leaders of the movement did not allow for the participation of the majority of the members, which, according to Padre Melo, led the peasants to believe that no real change had occurred. Padre Melo felt that the solution was to create a larger rural middle class, a gradual process that would lead to actual liberation, education and progress.

Tiriri's days seemed numbered. In December of 1967 – alongside stories on the PCB rural union leader Gregório Bezerra's trial⁴⁷⁰ and stories celebrating General Alfredo Ovando for having captured and killed “the second biggest threat to Latin America” (Che Guevara)⁴⁷¹ – the Cooperative project appeared to have failed. The property was returned to the hands of the original landowners, becoming reincorporated into the property of the Usina Santo Inácio.⁴⁷² To analyze the failure, the state set up a commission of deputies with the objective of arriving at a project for

⁴⁶⁹ “Ainda Tiriri,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 23 June 1963, 4. The end of the editorial states: “Pois o Governo – que só lhes pode dar palavras – não é capaz de ir além das palavras de Nabuco, ali mesmo em Massangana e há quase cem anos, pronunciadas.”

⁴⁷⁰ “STM julgará sexta-feira a apelação de Gregório Bezerra,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 9 December 1967, 1. Bezerra was sentenced to 19 years in prison by the military court for having tried to reinstate the Brazilian Communist Party and leading peasants and rural workers to invade lands and go on strike.

⁴⁷¹ “Guevara não foi fuzilado e falou muito antes de morrer,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 10 December 1967, 8.

⁴⁷² “Justiça faz voltar terras à posse da Usina Santo Inácio,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 5 December 1967, 12; “Usina já de posse das terras de Tiriri e IBRA nega participação na transação,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 6 December 1967, 3.

“authentic agrarian reform.”⁴⁷³ According to the commission, the area of Cabo, well known by international groups such as UNESCO, was in need of finding a true solution to the “human, agrarian and social problems.” The deputies claimed that the people of Cabo “suffered from the quotidian lack of consciousness of the magnitude of their problems.”⁴⁷⁴ Fully esconced in modernization theory, they made the following suggestions for the Cooperative: “1. To preserve at all costs the access to land for the rural workers with the goal of maintaing their trust in the government’s protection; 2. To apply the Estatuto da Terra, locating the agrarian problems and solving them; 3. Avoid the situation of Agrarian Reform becoming Agrarian Business without benefiting the majority of the people; 4. To plan and implement the ways to obtain the highest productivity and use of the land without being prejudiced by taking into consideration the human and social problems; 5. To educate the rural worker about modern technology and crop diversification; 6. To increase the use of instruments and machines needed by the rural worker for a more effective exploitation of the land; 7. To offer credit in an accessible form to finance such projects; 8. To secure a constant market for the commercialization of the agricultural products.”⁴⁷⁵ Such measures illustrate the mechanization and modernization of agriculture that the military government pursued throughout the Northeast in lieu of a program for agrarian reform based on the redistribution of land. They also reflect one of the primary criticisms of programs for agrarian reform during the dictatorship: The

⁴⁷³ “O assunto é politica...” *Diario de Pernambuco* 20 December 1967, 10.

⁴⁷⁴ “O assunto é politica...” *Diario de Pernambuco* 20 December 1967, 10.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

preponderance of studies, committees and projects that were often declared a “failure” before actually initiating any project for rural workers.⁴⁷⁶

Padre Melo continued to fight for the agrarian cooperative project of Tiriri.⁴⁷⁷ He claimed that the problem was not in the project, but in its administration, arguing that the SUDENE administrator was corrupt and had the same characteristics of a traditional usina owner, which created the problems of the cooperative system since it was not run like a cooperative.⁴⁷⁸ Padre Melo referred to other cases in which the latifundiários had re-seized their expropriated land: “vai fazer o que fez com Tabatinga e Garapu: abandonar os operários ao desemprego, vendendo as terras supervalorizadas.”⁴⁷⁹ Melo declared that the “peasant of Tiriri would only leave their lands with violence and blood.”⁴⁸⁰ He told reporters that he would resist and rebel, even if it meant his own death, but the commentary on his words is that they were useless means to preach violence instead of supporting the rural workers find a peaceful path to agrarian reform.⁴⁸¹

The state institutions for agrarian reform (IBRA and INDA) tried to wash their hands of any alleged involvement in the judicial case of Tiriri. The newspaper

⁴⁷⁶ Pereira, *The End of the Peasantry*.

⁴⁷⁷ The trajectory of Tiriri is extremely complicated. Although the original project was declared a failure, Padre Melo continued to support efforts to keep a cooperative alive in Tiriri, trying to work with different agricultural industrial companies. Although the name remained the same, the original project has gone through complete transformations from the 1960s to the present day. Tiriri was not included in the project of the Liga das Cooperativas Americanas promoted by the Church during the dictatorship but a separate project of Padre Melo.

⁴⁷⁸ “Padre Melo critica gerente da Tiriri,” *Diário de Pernambuco* 15 December 1967, 8.

⁴⁷⁹ “‘Somente Deus tirará gente de Tiriri sem violência e sangue:’ Padre Melo,” *Diário de Pernambuco* 7 December 1967, 3.

⁴⁸⁰ “O padre e o camponês,” *Diário de Pernambuco* 8 December 1967, 4.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

reports on the entire incident were overly vague and illusive, which may be read as a way the military government and the agrarian reform institutions tried to shift the focus from the actual issue of landowners reclaiming their lands and expelling the rural workers from their lands.⁴⁸² In an article that suggests how the government was trying to spin the incident into a positive step toward agrarian reform in terms of education, the National Institute of Agrarian Development (INDA) was cited as allocating NCr \$60,000 to courses in cooperativism at the Universidade Federal Rural de Pernambuco and the Escola de Agronomia in Paraíba.⁴⁸³ The courses were supposed to teach peasants about the concept of cooperativismo.

Another story in the *Diario de Pernambuco* about Tiriri clearly exemplifies the military government's discourse in the late 1960s on agrarian reform and historical symbols that invoked patriarchal metaphors to legitimize their power. A group of young women of the Cruzada Democrática – one of the groups who partook in the rosary marches in March 1964 – sent the *Diario de Pernambuco* a statement to be published, lamenting the failure of the Cooperative of Tiriri. The women claimed that the lack of technical preparation and the lack of solidarity amongst the rural workers led to the failure of the cooperative. The women asked the government not to give up on the project of cooperativism; they hoped that educational programs could

⁴⁸² For instance, when asked about the Cooperative of Tiriri, the judge of the comarca of Cabo from 1951-1961, Jeová da Rocha Wanderley, stated: “o meu conhecimento [de Tiriri] é através de noticiários, muitas vezes distorcido, hora a favor, hora contra.” Jeová da Rocha Wanderley, interview by Eliane Moury Fernandes, 20 January 1986, CEHIBRA da Fundação Joaquim Nabuco de Pesquisas Sociais, Recife, 7.

⁴⁸³ “INDA fornece NCr \$ 60 mil para cursos de cooperativismo,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 6 December 1967, 3. President Costa e Silva was in Mossoró, Rio Grande do Norte to inaugurate a new school of agronomy and electification services.

be initiated to teach the rural workers how to participate in cooperatives. And, the statement made a direct reference to slavery and abolition:

“Há, na história do Brasil, um fato muito expressivo. Os senhores que voluntariamente alforriaram os seus escravos muito antes da abolição já se haviam recuperado do prejuízo quando esta foi decretada, ao passo que muitos outros se arruinaram por não terem sido generosos.

A experiência de Tiriri não pode perder-se. Haja, quanto antes, uma conjugação de esforços para salvar esse exemplo de solidariedade cristã. Ninguém se omita, pois o serviço de salvação desse magnífico projeto é missão e encargo de toda a comunidade, não só do Nordeste, como de toda a nação.”⁴⁸⁴

What is striking about this published statement is how it compares to statements made about abolition before 1964, urging large landowners to replicate the visionary stance taken by slaveowners who freed their slaves before formal abolition by supporting the cooperative project. But, in what followed in the article suggests that the objective was not agrarian reform in the sense of the redistribution of land. The goals of supporting Tiriri seemed to be to strengthen bourgeois lifestyle, and to preserve the “folk” culture of the rural Northeast.

The article continued, with a commentary about the the women of the Cruzada Democrática, who were taking courses on “Domestic Arts” that prepared them for making the traditional costumes of the Northeast:

Foi realmente emocionante sentir o cuidado da Diretoria do referido educandário, procurando fazer um elo entre o passado, representado pelas Sinházinhas e o presente, representado pela mocidade do Colégio Militar, inculcando assim nos jovens de hoje, a beleza das nossas tradições, a riqueza da nossa história e a certeza de que sómente poderemos construir um Brasil grande e forte, alicerçando o progresso na nossa formação cristã e na grandeza dos feitos dos nossos ancestrais.

⁴⁸⁴ “Cruzada Feminina lamenta o fim da cooperativa de Tiriri,” *Diário de Pernambuco* 10 December 1967, 10.

Causou enorme realce a entrada do bolo de Formatura, trazido por alunos, representando os escravos, como a lembrar aos presentes, a formação da nossa raça e a beleza da Democracia que possuímos, sem a condenável distinção de raças, uma vez que somos iguais perante Deus, Supremo Criador do Universo.”⁴⁸⁵

The story exemplifies how the military combined the discourse of a certain type of modernization – through education projects – with a value attached to “traditional” customs and gender relations. The historical symbol of slavery as a way to talk about and organize rural workers belonged to groups who opposed the military government; namely, in the late 1960s, the Catholic Church. According to the military and its supporters, the “tragic” history of slavery in Brazil was best remembered in the form of a “traditional” cake for the middle-class that showed the progress and unity among all Brazilians under the cloth of the idea of racial democracy. But, even though cake is deliciously tempting and sweet to eat for a time, it also has relatively no nutritional value and a short shelflife.

⁴⁸⁵ “Cruzada Feminina lamenta o fim da cooperativa de Tiriri,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 10 December 1967, 10.

Chapter 5: The Return of *Lampião* to the *Terra do Sol*, 1955-1965

“Aquilo é que era um padrinho bom,” lembra Ana Maria dos Santos (Dona Nô), 77 anos, afilada de Lampião. Ela só guarda boas recordações desse mito tão polêmico e prefere invocar seu perfil heróico. Há quem discorde e o trate como um bandido cruel. Há que o critique pela violência, mas veja sua luta como uma forma de resistência a um sistema opressor. Ninguém o ignora.

“Histórias do cangaço movimentam turismo,” *Jornal do Commercio*, 1997

One of the symbols of regional identity that turned into a site of contestation during the Cold War was the cangaceiro, or backlands bandit.⁴⁸⁶ The symbol of the cangaceiro carries numerous meanings, as the article from *O Jornal do Commercio* suggests: honor and ruthless violence, resistance and barbarity, the “*cabra macho*” and the tragic victim of unequal social structures, a hero and a criminal. The cangaceiro has been used as a metaphor for the Brazilian nation, the Northeast, as well as specific individuals, functioning as an empty signifier since the meaning attached to the symbol depends on the historical context. This chapter examines how social actors in the 1950s and 1960s appropriated and politicized the symbol of the cangaceiro, and how, in doing so, they redefined the regional identity of *o Nordeste*.

The ways in which social actors appropriated the symbol of the cangaceiro cannot be simply categorized into Left or Right, or popular or elite. For the *Ligas*

⁴⁸⁶ Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Júnior, *A invenção do Nordeste e outros artes* (Recife: Fundação Joaquim Nabuco, Editorial Massangana/São Paulo: Cortez Editora, 2001). According to Albuquerque, *o Nordeste* is composed of four major themes: the cangaceiro, the coronel (rural political boss), droughts, and religious fanaticism.

Camponesas (Peasant Leagues), the cangaceiro was a hero, a “father” of agrarian reform, compared to the “guerrilheiros” of Cuba and China. The Brazilian Communist Party (PCB-Partido Comunista Brasileira) employed the symbol of the cangaceiro to emphasize their views of a progressive history, describing the cangaceiro as a primitive rebel of the past. Filmmakers of the era portrayed the cangaceiro as a symbol of the “authentic” *Nordeste* as well as a symbol of Brazil and of the Third World. On the political right, discourses that criminalized the rural social movements recalled discourses that criminalized the cangaceiros. What is fascinating about the symbol of the cangaceiro during this period is that it illustrates the how numerous groups and individuals vying for power approached the matter of the regional history-identity of *o Nordeste*.

A few key studies in the rich historiography on the cangaço provide further explanations about issues of representations of the cangaceiro. One historical debate stemmed from Hobsbawm’s *Bandits* (1971) because of the controversial sources Hobsbawm used to argue that bandits were “primitive rebels” that disappeared in modern society.⁴⁸⁷ Hobsbawm based his research on cangaceiros primarily on *literatura de cordel* (popular pamphlet poetry) and even used a still from Lima Barreto’s 1953 film, “O Cangaceiro,” to provide readers with a visual image of the cangaceiro.⁴⁸⁸ What is interesting about Hobsbawm’s choice of sources is that he

⁴⁸⁷ For an excellent discussion on the historiography of the “social bandit” that stemmed from Hobsbawm’s work, see Gilbert Joseph, “On the Trail of Latin American Bandits: A reexamination of Peasant Resistance,” *Latin American Research Review*, 25, no. 3 (1990): 7-53.

⁴⁸⁸ Lima Barreto’s film was not greatly celebrated in Brazil although the film won two awards at the Cannes Film Festival in 1953. Brazilian critics saw “O Cangaceiro” as

chose to use representations of the cangaceiro instead of actual accounts, interviews, film footage and photographs of Lampião and other cangaceiros, all of which were readily available.

In response to this type of research on representations of the cangaço, Linda Lewin studied how the representations of cangaceiros in popular culture reflected elite politics and popular poets' own politics more than factually recounting the history of the cangaço.⁴⁸⁹ Lewin showed a separation between historical fact and the politics of representation of the cangaço in popular culture. Expanding on the idea of representation, Maria Isuara Pereira de Queiroz categorized the types of representations of the cangaceiro into three fields: as a symbol in art, in sociology and in politics.⁴⁹⁰ Queiroz argued that after World War II, the cangaceiro became a national symbol, that represented three important ideologies of the era: first, the idea of national versus foreign. Connected to this idea, the cangaceiro represented the inequalities and relations of dependency between the industrialized, modern South

lacking "authenticity" because it was filmed in São Paulo and not in Northeastern Brazil, because the cangaceiros rode horses, and because the film seemed more like a U.S. cowboy western than a Brazilian film on cangaceiros. By using the still from the film, Hobsbawm then exposed himself to the criticism that his understanding of the cangaceiro was based on foreign models and not on the specific context of Northeastern Brazil.

⁴⁸⁹ Linda Lewin, "Oral Tradition and Elite Myth: The Legend of Antônio Silvino in Brazilian Popular Culture," *Journal of Latin American Lore* 5: 2 (1979): 157-204. In addition to Lewin, a number of scholars have studied the relationship between the cangaceiro and popular pamphlet poetry, *literatura de cordel*. These studies show how the myth of Lampião grew because of the folhetos, and also that he played an active role in shaping his popular representation in the popular poetry. See Gustavo Barroso, *Terra de sol* (Rio de Janeiro, 1956); Augustus Young, *Lampion and his bandits: the literatura de cordel of Brazil* (London: Menard Press, 1994).

⁴⁹⁰ Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz, *O messianismo no Brasil e no mundo* (São Paulo: Dominus, 1965).

and the feudal, backwards Northeast. The cangaceiro as the symbol of the Brazilian nation also rose in importance because of the “new” significance of the “povo,” or the miserable, poor, illiterate masses, as the heart of national identity. The cangaceiro turned into a symbol of the struggle of the poor against the rich. The “national/regional” characteristic of the symbol of the cangaceiro is critical to this study because it helps to explain why the cangaceiro – associated primarily with the sertão – was connected to the rural social movements in the 1950s and 1960s – movements located mainly in the *agreste* and *mata*. In other words, the symbol of the cangaceiro was not limited to its historical reality of representing the *sertanejo*. It functioned to represent the Nordeste, as well as the Brazilian and the Third World, in certain instances.

A number of recent studies have shown how communities in the sertão have used popular symbols in contemporary struggles by communities. These studies illustrate how community groups interpret and employ symbols such as the cangaceiro to form community identity and to mobilize politically. For example, Marcos Edilson de Araújo Clemente connects the symbol of the cangaceiro to memory studies, showing how local communities with a history of cangaceiros have been able to turn this history into sites of memory, such as museums, and *lieux de mémoire*, such as a carnival play in Paulo Afonso, Bahia. The community group performs the play each year to narrate present-day struggles through the history of Lampião.⁴⁹¹ Although not focused specifically on the symbol of the cangaceiro,

⁴⁹¹ Marcos Edilson de Araújo Clemente, “Lampiões acesos: A associação folclórico e comunitária dos ‘Cangaceiros de Paulo Afonso’ -- BA e os processos de constituição

Patricia Pessar's recent work broadly examines the relationship between identity and resistance in Northeastern Brazil, looking at the changing representations that a millenarian community in Bahia produced in relation to historic millenarian communities such as Canudos.⁴⁹² Pessar describes how a number of groups and individuals mobilized different representations of the community's religious leader from the 1970s to the 1990s, and suggests reasons for these changes, such as the increase of religious "folk" tourism.

This chapter combines diverse sources such as film, newspapers, testimonies and/or oral history, and scholarly studies to provide an intertextual understanding of the process of how the symbol of the cangaceiro entered into the political struggles in Northeastern Brazil in the 1950s and 1960s. The first section describes representations of cangaceiros in popular culture, examining *literatura de cordel* and a genre of Brazilian film known as the Nordeste. The next section discusses a series of newspaper reports and Pernambucan congressional hearings on the death of the famous cangaceiro, Lampião, regarding the burial of cangaceiro heads. These debates took place in 1959 at the same time as the congressional debates over the expropriation of engenho "Galiléia," the declared birthplace of the Ligas Camponesas. The third section examines how social actors on the political "left" used representations of cangaceiros in their struggles to change the dominant idea of *o Nordeste*. These groups include Francisco Julião's Ligas Camponesas and the

da memoria coletiva do cangaço (1956-1988)" Master's Thesis (Campinas, São Paulo, 2003).

⁴⁹² Patricia Pessar, *From Fanatics to Folk: Brazilian Millenarianism and Popular Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

Brazilian Communist Party (PCB). After this, I show what happened to the heads and to the symbol of the cangaceiro during the dictatorship.

The Cangaceiro in Popular Culture

Cultural production of the cangaceiro played a key role in defining public opinion about the symbol of the cangaceiro in the 1950s and 1960s. In popular poetry, stories of the cangaceiro reached local rural audiences in Northeastern Brazil. But, the stories of the cordel did not remain isolated in Northeastern Brazil. Not only were folhetos with the theme of the cangaceiro sold and written throughout Brazil, but filmmakers also chose to narrate films through literatura de cordel such as in Glauber Rocha's *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol*, or depict local markets and literatura de cordel in films of the cangaço such as in Carlos Coimbra's *Lampião, o rei do cangaço*, and Paulo Gil Soares' *Memoria do cangaço*. In these films, the cangaceiro symbolized *o Nordeste*, but it also symbolized Brazil and the third world. Focusing on the connection between representations in one of the better-known folhetos, José Pacheco's "A chegada de Lampeão no inferno," and the aforementioned films provides a lens to examine the construction cangaceiro as hero or bandit in the 1950s and 1960s.

José Pacheco's "A chegada de Lampeão no inferno" appeared in the Ligas Camponesas newspaper, *Liga*, in 1963. According to the preface published in the newspaper, the folheto shows the "admiração dos camponeses nordestinos por

Lampeão, esse inteligente guerrilheiro, cuja verdadeiro história ainda se contará um dia.”⁴⁹³ The preface states that in this popular poem Lampião is a figure that allows the rural population to face or to protest against their actual situation. “O inferno, descrito nestes versos é a casa-grande do latifundiário.” Lampião supposedly creates a real revolution in hell, battling against all the devils. Upon his victory, (according to the author of the preface), Lampeão declares: “se não houver fartura para todos ninguém tem direito a nada.” The author of the preface emphasized the socialistic motives behind Lampião’s struggles in hell, presenting him in *LIGA* as a hero.

According to the story, when Lampião arrives at hell’s gates, the Devil explains why Lampião cannot enter:

Só me chega gente ruim
Eu ando muito caipora
Estou até com vontade
De botar mais da metade
Dos que têm aqui pra fora

Lampião é um bandido
Ladrão de honestidade
Só vem desmoralizar
A minha propriedade

The devil then tells the watchman to gather three dozen *negros*, “a tropa armada” to defend the Devil’s property. There was a great battle, but in the end Lampião

⁴⁹³ José Pacheco, “A chegada de Lampeão no inferno,” *LIGA* 20 March 1963: 2.

triumphed by setting a fire that burned the cotton warehouse and all the money that the Devil possessed.⁴⁹⁴

The confusing part of the interpretation in the preface in *LIGA* is that Lampião did not make the statement that supposedly signified: if there is not enough for all, then no one will have anything. After Lampião burned the Devil's money and cotton warehouse, the Devil declared: "Se não houver bom inverno/ Tão cedo aqui no inferno/ Ninguém compra uma camisa." While the idea of the Devil symbolizing the large landowner and hell symbolizing the latifúndio seems logical, Lampião's role as a socialist hero is more incongruous, typical of representations of Lampião in literatura de cordel.⁴⁹⁵

Lampião represented as hero/bandit appears in many of the films of the cangaço that were popular during this period. Glauber Rocha's political film, *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* (*Black God/White Devil*, 1964), supposedly was based on a combination of José Pacheco's cordel and of Euclides da Cunha's *Os sertões*. The cangaceiro in *Deus e o diabo* supposedly represents a stage in the process of the peasant gaining a revolutionary consciousness. After messianism dies, the peasant turns to the cangaço, which according to Rocha, is the anarchist stage of rebellion. In the film, the cangaceiro Corisco explains to peasant Manoel/Satanás: "Homem nessa

⁴⁹⁴ The Ligas Camponesas and "communists" were continually accused by the landowners and mainstream media of setting cane fires throughout this period.

⁴⁹⁵ Another example that appeared in *Liga* that did not depict Lampião as a hero is José Pacheco's "Debate que teve Lampião com São Pedro," *LIGA* May 1963, 5. The popular poem was prefaced by explaining how this poetry is the true poetry of the masses. The poets tell simple stories, full of mysticism, that "agradam ao espírito simples do nordestino." The story described how all the saints in heaven had to fight to keep Lampião out, even using thunderbolts, to expel him.

terra só tem vaidade quando pega nas arma pra mudar o destino. Não é com rosário não, Satanás. É no rifle e no punhal!”⁴⁹⁶ Corisco is violent without preference, killing the rural poor then attacking the rich, torturing, robbing and killing. As Antônio das Mortes, the “matador de cangaceiros,” draws close to the cangaceiros to fulfill the destiny that he is condemned to, the blind narrator asks him if killing Corisco is the way that he helps his brothers, the povo. Antônio responds: “Um dia vai ter uma guerra maior nesse sertão...uma guerra grande, sem a cegueira de Deus e do Diabo. E pra que essa guerra comece logo, eu, que já matei Sebastião, vou matar Corisco.”⁴⁹⁷ According to Rocha, the “cangaceiros and fanatics” have to die before the true revolution can come to Northeastern Brazil.

The representations of the cangaceiro employed by Glauber Rocha unmistakably coded the film as *o Nordeste*. The figure of the cangaceiro in film always is represented by his costume: a crescent shaped leather hat adorned with metallic symbols, leather clothing, a large knife and often Pancho Villa-style bullets wrapped around his torso, and leather sandals.⁴⁹⁸ For Rocha, the cangaceiro was a symbol of primitive rebellion but not of social revolution, a type of rebellion that had to be rejected and overcome in order for nordestinos to acquire the political

⁴⁹⁶ Script, 281.

⁴⁹⁷ Script, 279.

⁴⁹⁸ According to Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz, the cangaceiro/cangaço stems from the term “canga” which was the “nome dado ao armamento de indivíduo que andava de bacamarte passado sobre os ombros, tal qual um boi no jugo, e sobrecarregado ainda de uma quantidade de outras armas. ...já em 1834, se apresentava de ‘chapéu de coiro, clavinotes, cartucheria de pele de onça pintada, longas facas enterçadas batendo na coxa”” quoted from Gustavo Barroso, *Herões e bandidos* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria Francisco Alves, 1917) in Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz, “Notas Sociológicas sobre o Cangaço,” *Ciência e Cultura* 27: 5 (1975): 495.

consciousness that would make them actors in a social revolution. Although this film was filmed and released at a time when rural nordestinos seemed as revolutionary as their counterparts in Cuba and China, *Deus e o diabo* does not depict a situation of triumph for the rural population. Change was insinuated at the conclusion, with Manuel and Rosa running away from the cangaceiros, but the representation of change is open-ended, undefined, and shakily uncertain.⁴⁹⁹ The final dialogue between Manoel and Rosa suggests this uncertainty of change and possibility of continuance with Rosa's announcement that she is going to have a baby, an announcement that follows the love scene between Rosa and Corisco and suggests the possibility of a future for the cangaço.⁵⁰⁰

One of the common themes in *Deus e o diabo* and in José Pacheco's cordel is this possibility for continuance of the cangaceiro in Northeastern Brazil even after the final band was killed, imprisoned and/or dispersed. In *Deus e o diabo*, Corisco is not simply Corsico but a combination of Lampião and Corisco (and also the messianic leader, Sebastião). In Corisco's first monologue in the film, this is clear as he has a

⁴⁹⁹ This style of ending has often been interpreted as part of the revolutionary style of these films in that it forces the audience to decide, thus provoking political consciousness. Exemplified by a reaction statement by Francisco Clodomir Rocha Girão, "É nesse tempestade de revolta, que G.R. joga o seu heroi. Heroi que representa e simboliza o caboclo nordestino, o homem do povo, o vaqueiro, o camponês, queu injustificado pelas leis da classe dominante, procura refúgio onde possa protestar, e nessa caminhada, ele atravessa por diversas fases, até correr, desesperadamente, para uma nova afirmação, que o diretor resolveu omitir, talvez, para deixar que o próprio espectador responda: Para onde irá Manuel? Qual a posição que Manuel assumirá? Qual a nova dimensão de luta em que se empenhará?" Francisco Clodomir Rocha Girão in "V Jornada Nacional de Cineclubes," Salvador, Bahia. 6 a 13 de fevereiro de 1965. Associação de Críticos Cinematograficos do Ceará, Clube de Cinema de Fortaleza, Federação Norte-Nordeste de Cineclubes. Pasta "Deus e o diabo na terra do sol" FUNARTE, Rio de Janeiro.

⁵⁰⁰ Ismail Xavier...

dual personality of Corisco and of Lampião. Lampião has physically been killed, but as Corsico/Lampião declares: “Lampião will never die.” The idea is clear that Lampião will never disappear from the sertão or from the minds and actions of the Nordeste. This same conclusion also appears in the final stanza of José Pacheco’s cordel, a phrase has become a common saying throughout Northeastern Brazil:

No inferno não ficou
No ceu também não chegou
Por certa está no sertão

Lampião continues to live in the sertão, as a symbol and figure in popular culture, perhaps more popular after his death than during his lifetime.

In 1965, Paulo Gil Soares’s media-metragem *Memória do Cangaço*, presented a political documentary on cangaceiros and their relationship to present-day cowboys. Although this was Soares’s first film, he had previously worked with Glauber Rocha on *Deus e o diabo* as the assistant director, and Rocha referred to Soares as the person on the film making team who knew the most about Northeastern Brazil. Similar to many films about Northeastern Brazil, the film opens in a typical market and uses traditional Nordeste music of men performing literatura de cordel. A voice-over states that in the nineteenth century, groups of cangaceiros emerged to construct *o Nordeste*, performing acts of heroism and goodness in constructing agrarian organizations, in spite of having to combat their constant enemy, the soldiers. The film shifts suddenly to the Instituto Médico Legal Nina Rodrigues in Bahia. Images of the white courtyard and European-style statues appear on the screen while Dr. Estácio de Lima explains about the cangaço. The cangaceiro expert argues that the

cangaceiros existed because of a criminal predisposition: “distúrbios endócrinos e fatores morfológicos tipicamente caraterizados naqueles individuos.” He described biological reasons for their criminal predisposition such as glands and testicles that created “extremely dangerous” men. As the university doctor provides this “expert” testimony, Soares shifts from images of the university to images of present-day vaqueiros at a local market, dressed in leather and riding their small horses in a corral.

“To see if this professor is correct, we spoke with one of these men,” announces the documentary-style voice-over. Soares, putting himself in the film as the interviewer, talks with an old vaqueiro mounted on his horse, Seu Gregório. Seu Gregório explains that he doesn’t earn monthly wages, he is illiterate and there are no schools near his home. His wife died because the folk medicine he could afford to buy to heal her didn’t work. As Seu Gregório rides off into the sertão, another voice-over counters the biological explanation given by Dr. Estácio for the emergence of the cangaceiro. The voice-over claims that the sertanejo has been abandoned by the state. Rebellion can only be explained as resulting from the lack of justice and precarious material conditions for sertanejos. “E quando se formavam em cangaceiro a sociedade usava contra eles o pior dos remedios—a polícia.” The documentary interviews Zé Rufino—the coronel responsible for killing and beheading over twenty cangaceiros, Ângelo Roque—one of Lampião’s cangaceiros who now works as a security guard, and Dadá—the surviving wife of Corisco. Soares was the first filmmaker to splice in cuts from Benjamin Abrahão’s 1936 actual footage of Lampião’s band, a film that had supposedly been “lost” in the Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda (DIP) after being seized by the polícia federal upon its first

showing in 1940. Abrahão's film was discarded in a moldy, humid environment, only partially recovered and restored in 1957.⁵⁰¹ Within the context of the "defeat" of the Ligas Camponesas and the recently instated military regime, Soares's use of this footage, of which it is more than likely he knew the history, along with his choice of images and voice-overs used to describe the history of the cangaceiros illustrate a way in which memory was used as a form of denouncement and resistance.

The planned but never filmed third sequence of "Deus e o diabo" was supposed to have been about the then present-day rural activism and peasant movements, and this sequence supposedly would have been filmed by Paulo Gil Soares. Taking this into consideration, it is likely that his first film *Memória do cangaço* was not only a documentary about the history of the cangaceiro, but it also held broader implications of memory versus history. The film subverted the official history and "expert" explanations for the cangaceiro while at the same time providing the space to suggest how social and economic conditions continued to create a situation of misery for the present-day rural population. As in the time of the cangaço, the police continued to be the "worst medicine" for the problem, and the state continued to abandon the rural population.

But the political films associated with the cinema novo movement were not the only films released during this period that dealt with the theme of the cangaceiro in the *Nordeste*. From 1960 to 1976, over forty films associated with this genre were

⁵⁰¹ Screened in Fortaleza in 1940, Abrahão's film supposedly caused an extreme reaction in the audience, especially the scenes that "revelavam atrocidades da polícia, estupros, cabeças cortadas, propriedades violadas, etc." José Umberto, "Benjamin Abrahão, o mascate que filmou Lampião," in *Cangaço: O Nordeste no Cinema Brasileiro* (Brasília: Arathar Soluções Gráficas, 2005): 30.

produced in Brazil, making the Nordeste one of the most prolific types of films produced in Brazil.⁵⁰² These films cast the same standard characters: soldiers, religious fanatics, poor peasants, rural political bosses or large landowners, and cangaceiros.⁵⁰³ In the early 1960s, Carlos Coimbra released two extremely popular films—in terms of ticket sales—about the cangaço: *A morte no comando do cangaço* (1960) and *Lampião, o rei do cangaço*.⁵⁰⁴ (1962)

A morte no comando do cangaço established Coimbra as the prominent director of commercial films of the cangaço.⁵⁰⁵ The film begins with the line of cangaceiros coming over the top of a hill, (referring to *O Cangaceiro*), who then proceed to engage in a battle with a family of small holders. The family loses the bloody battle against the cangaceiros and their heads are severed and impaled. After the gruesome battle, the male protagonist enters the story, returning to his burned house and dead family. The story traces the hero's travails in gathering forces and going in pursuit of revenge. In *A morte*, Milton Ribeiro interpreted the “bad” cangaceiro, an actor who interpreted the cangaceiro as antagonist in numerous films, including *O Cangaceiro*, *Entre o Amor e o Cangaço*, *O Cabeleira*, *Três Cabras de*

⁵⁰² Also, it must be noted that cangaceiros were real figures in Brazilian history that existed until 1940 when the final cangaceiros were killed or imprisoned.

⁵⁰³ The character of the prostitute is more common in the commercial productions than in the political films. At times the poor peasant is replaced by townsfolk or cowhands.

⁵⁰⁴ Coimbra was not a Cinemanovista or political filmmaker but it is important to note that a later film, “Os inconfidentes” was used as propaganda for the military regime.

⁵⁰⁵ In an interview, Glauber Rocha stated that he had originally wanted to make a film on the cangaço but when he proposed the film, he was told to leave films about the cangaço to the expert: Carlos Coimbra.

Lampião, and *A Lei do Sertão*.⁵⁰⁶ What is particularly interesting is that by the end of the story, the hero (Alberto Ruschel—also the protagonist in *O Cangaceiro*) and the female protagonist (Aurora Duarte—producer and well-known actress from Pernambuco) become cangaceiros, dressed in the typical clothing and hats, as they make their way through the caatinga to the final battle scene. The scene suggests that they had to become cangaceiros to engage in the violent battle in the sertão. In the final battle, the bad cangaceiro (Ribeiro) and the hero (Ruschell) engage in a battle with machetes, and his wife ends up shooting the bad cangaceiro to save the hero's life. In the final scene, resembling so many other Westerns, the couple rides off into the sunset.

Coimbra's second "nordestern" film, *Lampião, o Rei do Cangaço*, starts in a local fair, with a blind man reciting literatura de cordel, a common scene in many films about Northeastern Brazil. Throughout the film, Coimbra used the clay figurines typical of the artisan in Pernambuco to precede major shifts between scenes. Coimbra's *Nordeste* is folkloric, containing elements such as the clay figurines, literatura de cordel, bumba-meu-boi, and the cangaceiro to code the film as being "authentically" Northeastern. According to Coimbra, he conducted research for two months before filming *Lampião*, conducting interviews with people in Bahia and Pernambuco who knew *Lampião*. Coimbra claimed that the film was based on the testimonies of the rural people, who, according to Coimbra, spoke of *Lampião* in the present tense and only referred to *Lampião* and Maria Bonita as heroes. Thus, the

⁵⁰⁶ Lucila Ribeiro Bernardet and Francisco Ramalho Jr., "Cangaço--Da vontade de se sentir enquadrado," in *Cangaço: O Nordeste no cinema brasileiro* org. Maria do Rosário Caetano, (Brasília: Avathar, 2005): 34.

film depicted Lampião as a hero and a “Robin Hood.” He saved women from being raped, he only killed people who wanted to kill him, and everyone revered him in the sertão except for the soldiers. In this film, the cangaceiros all had nuclear families, emphasizing the version of the cangaceiros as ordinary heroes of the *Nordeste*. But, the fight of the cangaceiros seemed to be in vain. As Lampião explained to Maria Bonita: “vinte e um anos de luta. Pra que? O sertão continua o mesmo. O mundo pra melhorar precisa fazer outro.”⁵⁰⁷ The final battle scene between the cangaceiros and the volantes follows this declaration, dramatically ending the lives of Lampião and Maria Bonita.

Although the representations of cangaceiros in the commercial films of Coimbra differed from the political films of the cinemanovistas, the films shared certain characteristics. One of these was the relationship of the cangaceiro to Brazilian national identity in film.⁵⁰⁸ The films of the cangaço in the late 1950s and early 1960s emphasized the idea of authenticity. Filmmakers traveled to the sertão of Northeastern Brazil and shot the films for months on location. The directors interviewed and studied the subject in order to portray a realistic view of the cangaceiros. What is interesting is that even though the objectives and politics of the filmmakers differed, the films (re)produced certain key codes that meant *o Nordeste*, such as the cangaceiro but also the themes of “feudal” violence, the harshness of the

⁵⁰⁷ Lucila Ribeiro Bernardet and Francisco Ramalho Jr., “Cangaço--Da vontade de se sentir enquadrado,” in *Cangaço: O Nordeste no cinema brasileiro*, org. Maria do Rosário Caetano (Brasília: Arathar, 2005): 47.

⁵⁰⁸ As Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz argued, the intellectual elite portrayed the cangaceiro in art as a national symbol, a “símbolo de liberdade contra a sujeição.” Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz, “Notas sociológicas,” 509.

geography in terms of the climate and the vegetation, and the general poverty of the region, exemplified by illiteracy, hunger, misery. The popular or folk culture of *o Nordeste* such as literatura de cordel, bumba-meu-boi, xaxado and other rhythms, and outdoor markets (feiras) also coded *o Nordeste* in the films.

In Brazilian Nordesterns, directors claimed to be providing the authentic version of history, often connected to film aesthetics, costumes, and location. This was in part a reaction to the studio productions from a previous era such as Lima Barreto's Cannes film festival prizewinner, *O cangaceiro* (1953), which was criticized as being a "Hollywoodization" of the Third World. The attention given to authenticity also reflected the influence of neo-realism as well as Italian Westerns' depiction of realism in terms of bodies and scenery.⁵⁰⁹ In the context of the Cold War, this interest in authenticity also connects to the rise in nationalism and nationalist projects in the Third World, and filmmakers' desires to reject the Hollywood and European exotic versions of the Third World. A claim to authenticity signified that directors from the Third World painted themselves as the legitimate authority in depicting the "reality" of the Third World.

The directors of the Nordesterns based their claims to authenticity on the research they conducted for the films, such as numerous interviews with people in rural Northeastern Brazil. For instance, Glauber Rocha based Antônio das Mortes on Coronel José Rufino from Bahia. Furthermore, filmmakers gave attention to details

⁵⁰⁹ Ignacio Ramonet claims "Extreme realism of bodies (hairy, greasy, foul-smelling, cloths of objects including a mania for weapons) in Italian films is above all intended to compensate for the complete fraud of the space and origins. The green pastures, farms and cattle off American Westerns are replaced by large, deserted canyons (located in southern Italy or Spain)." Ignacio Ramonet, "Italian Westerns as Political Parables," *Young Cinema and Theatre* 2/3 (1988): 13.

such as dialogue, costumes, and scenery. In a debate about *Deus e diabo* in 1964 before the Cannes Film Festival, Glauber Rocha emphasized the “authenticity” of his film, stating that the actor who played Corisco looked exactly like the actual Corsico, or to put it more precisely, the actor had “90 percent of the characteristics of the real figure.”⁵¹⁰ Paulo Gil Soares claimed that the reason why they paid attention to these details was to “implodir os limites entre ficção e realidade, confundindo representação e real.”⁵¹¹ In addition, older residents of Monte Santo were interviewed about whether they thought the characters appeared “real” or not.⁵¹² Coimbra worked with one of the actual ex-cangaceiras, Dada, to reconstruct the story of the “blonde devil” Corisco (Dada’s partner). Dada sewed the costumes of all the male and female cangaceiros, a detail that was greatly praised in terms of showing the authentic story of the cangaço in all the major Brazilian newspaper film reviews. Many of the film reviews of Nordesterns commented on how well the films reproduced the Nordestino accent; for example, in a review on Coimbra’s *A morte comanda o cangaço*, a critic

⁵¹⁰ “Glauber Rocha, Walter Lima Jr., David Neves, Leon Hirszman: *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol*,” in Alex Viany: *O processo de cinema novo*, ed. José Carlos Avellar, (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Aeroplano, 1999): 77.

⁵¹¹ Bernardo Carvalho, “Sertão” *Folha de São Paulo* 16 Outubro 1994. MAM-RIO: file on Deus e o diabo.

⁵¹² In film reviews of *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol*, Rocha commented on how a older woman from Milagreiros thought Othon Bastos was the spitting image of Corisco, which reflects the importance given to authenticity. Paulo Gil Soares also described one of the older residents in believing that the actor who played Sebastião was really a religious beato: “A dona Eduíge, por exemplo, acreditava que o Lídio Silva, que interpretava o personagem do beato Sebastião, era realmente um beato.” Bernardo Carvalho, “Sertão” *Folha de São Paulo* 16 Outubro 1994. MAM-RIO: file on Deus e o diabo.

wrote that “o linguajar é puro nordeste, no sotaque bem ensaído e bem empregado, na construção da frase, na doçura do cantar a palavra, na terminologia.”⁵¹³

Many filmmakers shot Nordesterns in the style of documentaries or cinema-verité, producing what they claimed were scenes of authentic Northeastern culture. Paulo Gil Soares’s documentary, *Memória do cangaço* (1965), filmed interviews with sertanejos, ex-cangaceiros, and Coronel José Rufino, the famed “cangaceiro killer” with the purpose of “demystifying the figure of the cangaceiro and bringing him to back to his real space within the Northeast.”⁵¹⁴ Even commercial productions such as Coimbra’s films focused on local/regional culture such as clay sculptures, regional dances and music such as bumba-meu-boi, and local foods. As Paulo Emilio Salles Gomes observed, “in the film world of the cangaço, everyday life was filled with profane and sacred ceremonies. There are constantly *festas* with dancing, singing and eventually, some orgies.”⁵¹⁵ Often, these films started with voice-overs explaining the social and political history of Northeastern Brazil. Aesthetically, many of the films – and most of the political films associated with the Cinema Novo Movement such as Glauber Rocha’s *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* and Paulo Gil Soares’ *Memória do cangaço* – employed what have been labeled “realistic” techniques. These filmmakers used hand-held camera shots, non-professional actors, natural lighting; oftentimes they were shot in black and white and used direct sound.

Another important aesthetic element used in judging the authenticity of a Nordestern

⁵¹³ Salvyano Cavalcanti de Paiva, “A morte comanda o cangaço” June 1961. MAM-Rio, file on A morte comanda o cangaço, #27.

⁵¹⁴ Miriam Alencar, “Cinema Novo, última safra (II): Memórias de um Bahiano” *Jornal do Brasil*, 12 January 1966.

⁵¹⁵ Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes, “O universo fílmico do cangaço, anotações para aulas.” Cinemateca Brasileira/Arquivo Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes. Doc: PE/PI.0486.

had to do with horses. The American Cowboy always appeared on horseback, but supposedly, the cangaceiro never used horses, relying only on travel by foot. Thus, if horses were used in a Nordeste film, the film was being flagged as an inauthentic copy of Hollywood or Italian films. Sometimes horses were seen as authentic if they were small and undernourished, depicted as “typical” Nordeste horses; for instance, the horses ridden by the cangaceiros in Nelson Pereira dos Santos’s *Vidas Secas* (Barren Lives, 1962).

Debates also ensued between the filmmakers and critics about what was “realistic” and “authentic,” often basing the distinction on a film’s similarity to Hollywood or Italian Westerns. While some critics claimed that Carlos Coimbra’s productions were authentic and praised his realistic depiction of Nordeste culture and history, more frequently, critics compared the commercial productions to the political productions, arguing that the political films portrayed “reality.” Critics based this reality not only on the film aesthetics, production costs, on authentic representations of Northeastern Brazil, and the presence or absence of horses, but also on the film’s intended audience. Coimbra and other directors supposedly made their films with a “foreign” audience in mind and aspired to gain recognition at foreign film festivals.

Another theme associated with the cangaceiro in Nordeste films was violence. For example, most of the promotional material for Nordeste films emphasizes violence. The poster for *Deus e o diabo* portrays a large knife, held by Corisco who has long, wild hair and an angry expression, framed by a jagged, red sun. In the promotional posters of Coimbra’s films, the cangaceiros are savages, blurred images with long

hair, screaming mouths and holding large knives covered in blood. The films and posters advertise severed heads, perceived as a “typical” occurrence in Northeastern Brazil in battles between soldiers and cangaceiros because of the famous case of the beheading of Lampião and his band and Corisco, but nonetheless, a spectacle of violence.⁵¹⁶ The promotional materials for *Faustão* (1971) drew a quote from Glauber Rocha: “O mais violento, o mais humano, o mais agressivo, o melhor filme de cangaço feito no Brasil.”⁵¹⁷ The posters also promised that “vai correr tanto sangue que nem eu quero estar vivo quando acabar.” (so much blood will run that I won’t even want to be alive when it is over) These films promoted violence, both as an aesthetic and as a means to bring people to the theaters.

Whereas violence in the Italian Westerns functioned as a way for men to show their manliness, violence in the Nordesterns attempts to portray either a revolutionary struggle or a spectacle. While those who kill are defined in the Nordestern as machos or “cabra macho,” a difference is drawn between the perverse and the good macho in scenes of torture. In Carlos Coimbra’s *Corisco, o diabo louro* and Fernando de Barros’s *Riacho de sangue*, scenes of women being tortured and whipped differentiate the macho from the perverse. In *Deus e o diabo*, the scenes of the raid on the large landowner’s house show the cangaceiros raping, torturing and murdering. This coincides with race or religion: those characters who are darker skinned or who are religious fanatics are more likely to partake in sadistic violence. As Gail

⁵¹⁶ The heads were cut from the bodies of Lampião, Maria Bonita and the other members of his band, photographed and then went on tour throughout Brazil. They were later held on display and for scientific (criminal) research in Salvador, Bahia until 1968 when family members were granted the right to bury the heads of their relatives.

⁵¹⁷ Folder on *Faustão* at FUNARTE, Rio de Janeiro.

Bederman has argued, this is not by coincidence. The discourse of civilization and manliness is rooted in ideas of (Christian) white supremacy and in Northeasterns the difference between “just” and “sadistic” violence separates the real men from the savages.⁵¹⁸

As critic Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes pointed out in critiquing the films of the *cangaço*, since the film industry was located in southern Brazil, many of the filmmakers were as guilty of exoticizing the Northeastern region as European or Hollywood filmmakers were in exoticizing the Third World. According to Salles Gomes, the authenticity was a product of the South “using, interpreting and industrializing the folklore of the Northeast.”⁵¹⁹ In a study slated for publication in 1967, one of most important film critics from Northeastern Brazil argued that the genre of the Northeastern was based on a denial of the “authentic” Northeast: “o gênero filme-do-cangaço representa uma só e única coisa: a negação dos autênticos valores culturais nordestinos, valores políticos, sociais, humanos, folclóricos, e geográficos.”⁵²⁰ The “real” Nordeste that these directors reproduced was the *sertão*, based on filming a few key locations that expressed this type of Nordeste. Taken together, the Northeasterns constructed the folklore, the towns, and even the “accent”

⁵¹⁸ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). This relates especially to Bederman’s final chapter, “*Tarzan* and after.”

⁵¹⁹ Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes, “O universo fílmico do *cangaço*, anotações para aulas.” Cinemateca Brasileira/Arquivo Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes. Doc: PE/PI.0486. Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes used structuralist analysis associated with dependency theory to examine cultural production and film in Brazil, which is clear in his analysis of the films of the *cangaço*. See, Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes, *Cinema: Trajetória no subdesenvolvimento* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1980).

⁵²⁰ Wills Leal, *O Nordeste no cinema* (João Pessoa: Editora Universitária; Salvador: Universidade Federal da Bahia, 1982): 89.

of Northeastern Brazil, a region that is actually much more diverse and varied than what appeared on screen. In the filmmakers' rejection of the romantic or exotic version of poverty in the Third World, they created an ugly and miserable version that was not any more realistic or less of a representation than the European, Hollywood and studio films. As one recent study on the "rural" in Brazilian film argues, with the Nordesterns, the cultural industry imported the format and selected an "other" [sertanejo] to affirm Brazilian national identity.⁵²¹ The question that remains is how such representations of the cangaceiro related to the struggle for land in the 1950s and 1960s, and to do that, we must begin with severed heads.

A Few Embalmed Heads

From April to September of 1959, the *Diário de Pernambuco* published a series on the cangaço, interviewing ex-cangaceiros, surviving family members, politicians, soldiers and others. Sensationalist journalism certainly was a factor in the attention these stories were given, since most of the stories ran alongside gruesome photographs of severed heads, but beyond the sensationalism, the rise in rural activism at this time probably influenced the newsworthiness of the stories.⁵²² The

⁵²¹ Celia Aparecida Ferreira Tolentino, *O rural no cinema brasileiro* (Sao Paulo: Editora UNESP, 2000): 94.

⁵²² In the first report in the series, Barbosa raises the point that these debates about the cangaceiro heads started in 1953, published in *O Cruzeiro*. This makes sense as 1953 was also the year that Lima Barreto's film, *O Cangaceiro* was released and won international awards at the Cannes film festival. The debates about the heads was not newsworthy, however, at least for the *Diario de Pernambuco*; no articles on

series started with coverage of debates in the Pernambuco state legislature about the legal right of the Instituto Médico Legal Nina Rodrigues in Bahia to continue to hold severed heads of cangaceiros on public display at the Museu Etnográfica e Antropológico Estácio de Lima (connected to the Instituto), a display that included the heads of Lampião, Maria Bonita and Corisco.⁵²³ While this was not the first time the issue arose in Pernambucan politics – a governor of Pernambuco denounced the display of the heads as early as 1938 – the timing, coinciding with the legal struggles for expropriation of the Engenho Galileia, must be taken into consideration.

One of the consistent themes in this series appeared in the first article: Brazilian law versus scientific rights. The newspaper report stated that an article in the Brazilian Penal Code declared it illegal to disrespect cadavers, a crime punishable by prison and monetary fines.⁵²⁴ According to the article, the families of the cangaceiros were trying to use this law to obtain the right to bury the embalmed heads. On the scientific front, the director of the Nina Rodrigues Institute, Dr. Estácio de Lima, argued that the heads were “anatomic pieces,” comparable to

cangaceiro heads were published in the *Diario* in 1953. Although there is no conclusive evidence on the matter, the “newsworthiness” of the topic in 1959 may be related to the increase in rural social activism in rural Pernambuco in 1959, as well as the expropriation of engenho “Galiléia.” (While Ligas Camponesas existed in 1953, the movement became much more powerful in 1959.)

⁵²³ Although it is not clear exactly why this was a matter for the Pernambucan state legislature (it may have been because Virgulino Ferreira da Silva, “Lampião,” was born in Pernambuco), the debates and subsequent “special reports” by the *Diário* provide an interesting perspective about state politics and opinions about the rural population and the increasing rural social activism in 1959. Also, since the *Diario* published a great deal on Lampião when he was alive, this may have influenced the decision to make the topic newsworthy.

⁵²⁴ Severino Barbosa, “Familia de Lampião reclama a sua cabeça” *Diario de Pernambuco* 12 April 1959, 10.

mummies in Egypt.⁵²⁵ Alongside the second article in the series appeared a photograph of the director of the Nina Rodrigues Institute holding the heads of Maria Bonita and Lampião under his arms as if they were soccer balls. The caption explained: “Completamente deformadas, essas cabeças não podem servir para estudos.”⁵²⁶

It is important to further explain a few factors of this debate. First, the Instituto Nina Rodrigues was associated with studies on criminality based on ideas of scientific racism.⁵²⁷ The heads were studied and measured to better understand what biological traits the cangaceiros possessed to make them criminals.⁵²⁸ By 1959, the

⁵²⁵ These claims also appeared in a report in *O Cruzeiro* 6 Junho 1959, when Estácio de Lima stated: “Compreendo perfeitamente os sentimentos da família de Lampião. Mas precisamos, principalmente no campo científico, nos guiar pela razão, em vez de nos deixar dominar pelo sentimento. As cabeças estão conservadas pelo método egípcio de mumificação. Elas são documentos inestimáveis de uma época da criminalidade brasileira.”

http://memoriaviva.digi.com.br/ocrucruzeiro/06061959/060659_2b.htm

⁵²⁶ Severino Barbosa, “Colecionar cabeças humanas é crime!” *Diário de Pernambuco* 19 Abril 1959, 14.

⁵²⁷ Nina Rodrigues was well-known for his criminology studies and his thesis on the degenerate “mestiço” of Brazil.

⁵²⁸ The heads had quite a journey before their arrival at the Nina Rodrigues institute. Supposedly, after being severed in 1938, they traveled throughout the states of Northeastern Brazil, attracting large crowds. Then they were measured, weighed, and examined at the Medicina Legal in Maceió, then they went to the south of Brazil. Afterwards, they spent six years at the Faculdade de Odontologia da Universidade Federal da Bahia, again, studied, measured, and weighed for criminology studies on pathologies. After this, they ended in the Instituto Nina Rodrigues in Salvador, Bahia. Semira Adler Vainsencher, “Lampião (Virgulino Ferreira da Silva), <http://www.fundaj.gov.br:8080/notitia/servlet/newstorm.ns.presentation.NavigationServlet?publicationCode=16&pageCode=308&textCode=976&date=currentDate>. Accessed: 7 September 2005. The Museu Antropológico Estácio de Lima in Salvador, part of the Instituto Médico-Legal Nina Rodrigues, now holds a collection of cangaceiro artifacts. Maria do Rosário Caetano, “‘Nordestern’: luz, câmera, cangaço,” *Revista de História da Biblioteca Nacional* no. 3 (September 2005): 27.

validity for this type of scientific research was questionable at best. (Even in 1938, this type of research was questionable.) Élise Grunspan-Jasmin argues that the preservation of the heads was specifically linked to Estácio de Lima and his personal campaign to preserve the heads, for “scientific purposes,” and hold them on display as museum pieces.⁵²⁹ The heads were in a display case in the Museu, alongside their clothing, weapons and other personal items to show, according to Grunspan-Jasmin, “the power of repression.”⁵³⁰ The photograph of the director with the heads, while extremely disturbing, also merits attention. The way the caption was phrased “completely deformed, these heads can no longer serve for studies” suggests that if the heads were not *completely* deformed, they might be useful to the progress of scientific knowledge, which leads one to believe that ideas of biological “criminality” were still somewhat accepted or acceptable. At the same time, both the scientific rigor and the respect for human beings was attacked by the image of the director holding the heads under his arms. The photograph questioned the claims of scientific preservation since it was clear that no special protection from deteriorating conditions existed, further emphasized by the casual handling of human heads.

By cutting the heads off the bodies of the famous cangaceiros and holding them on public display, the Brazilian government, the directors of the Nina Rodrigues Institute and those people who wished to see the cangaceiros “punished” for their crimes, were “instructing” the rural population about the tolerance and consequences of rural rebellion in Brazilian society. As Foucault explains, “the body is directly

⁵²⁹ Élise Grunspan-Jasmin, *Lampião: Senhor do Sertão, vidas e mortes de um cangaceiro*. Trans. Maria Celeste Franco Faria Marcondes and Antonio de Pádua Danesi (São Paulo: Editora USP, 2006), 337-338.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, 341.

involved in a political field; power relations have immediate hold up on it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs.”⁵³¹ Although the heads appear to contradict Foucault’s argument about the disappearance of physical punishment with the modern prison system, I believe that the heads represent the dominant classes’ views of *o Nordeste* and of the rural population. I am not making the argument that the heads prove that Northeastern Brazil was in fact a “pre-modern” society—a familiar argument used to explain the backwardness of this region. The treatment of the severed cangaceiro heads by the dominant classes and the Brazilian government shows that at least among the dominant groups, *o Nordeste* and its inhabitants were considered pre-modern. Punishing the cangaceiros and, to some extent the rural population, bore little difference from the serfs public punishment in Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*. Modern disciplinary methods would not work on people considered feudal. But, the fact that the heads were held at the Nina Rodrigues Institute, borrowing from Foucault—a “specialized” institution that uses its power to discipline society—demonstrates that this supposedly pre-modern form of punishment existed within a modern system of discipline.

What the debates published in the *Diario de Pernambuco* illustrate was the challenge that existed not only for the legitimacy of the heads being held on display but also for the legitimacy of the dominant classes’ power. One narrative of resistance in the series on the cangaceiro heads proclaimed the right of the family as Christians to bury the heads of their deceased family members. Lampião and Maria

⁵³¹ Michel Foucault, “The Body of the Condemned, from *Discipline and Punish*,” in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984): 173.

Bonita's daughter, Expedita Ferreira, claimed to pray every night for her parents' souls and made promises to saints, exemplifying how she used her faith to fight for the burial of the heads. In an interview with reporter Severino Barbosa, Expedita Ferreira described her parents as good, caring parents.⁵³² Photographs portrayed Expedita smiling with her own children, and emphasized her legal marriage and her "poor but happy" home. She made a plea to those with power in the newspaper report:

"Não sei porque os homens de cultura desta terra não compreenderam ainda o tamanho de seu erro. No Brasil, não existe pena de morte. No entanto meus pais foram mortos. E ainda mais cortaram sua cabeça, atiraram os seus corpos aos urubus e há vinte e um anos, proibem um direito que é nosso, parentes de Lampião, sepultar seus restos mortais. Não sei porque fazem isso. Senhores, como filha, eu lhes peço enterrem a cabeça de meus pais pelo amor de Deus. Eles também foram seres humanos."⁵³³

Expedita's plea for the burial of her parents' heads bears a resemblance to other stories of resistance in Northeastern Brazil at this time. The newspaper article emphasized her qualities as a legally married, "good" Christian. Although she lacked the power or education of the "homens de cultura," Expedita positioned herself as morally superior to those with power. Her plea insinuated that the government and the directors of the Nina Rodrigues Institute lacked Christian values and morals since they continued to display the heads of her parents, not only disrespecting the bodies and the bond between parent and child, but also disrespecting the right of burial. The plea also is similar to the "origin" story of the Ligas Camponesas, illustrating the

⁵³² Severino Barbosa, "Pelo amor de Deus, sepultem a cabeça de meus pais!" *Diario de Pernambuco* 3 May 1959, p.22.

⁵³³ Severino Barbosa, "Pelo amor de Deus, sepultem a cabeça de meus pais!" *Diario de Pernambuco* 3 May 1959, 22.

broader implications of such a narrative of resistance. The Ligas Camponesas supposedly originated on the engenho “Galiléia” in 1955 as the Sociedade de Plantadores e Pecuária de Pernambuco (SAPPP), a sociedade that had formed to provide the rural workers with means to have proper burials instead of having to borrow a communal coffin from the municipality. Landowner Beltrão supposedly forbid the SAPPP and began to expel families from his lands, which is when the rural workers went to lawyer Francisco Julião who took on their case and argued for the legal right for the workers to obtain the title to “Galiléia.” Central to both Galiléia and Expedita’s plea was the idea that the poor, as good Christians, have the ability to use their moral superiority to resist, or at least, question the power of the large landowner, the government, or the directors of a research institute.⁵³⁴

The topic of violence figured prominently throughout the series on the cangaceiros, with soldiers—the instrument of enforcing state’s/elite classes’ disciplinary power—portrayed as more violent and less honorable than the cangaceiros. As one report explained:

Os cangaceiros representavam o crime, a violência, a justiça pelos próprios mãos. Os soldados de volante deveriam representar a Lei, mas simbolizavam coisa muito diferente.

Mocinhas perderam a virgindade, nas mãos da policiais. Fazendas e plantações foram incendiadas por soldados de volante, que em violência e sede de sangue, muitas vezes superaram os cangaceiros.

⁵³⁴ Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz also makes this argument in relation to the symbol of the cangaceiro in the post-War period in the artistic representations, claiming that the cangaceiro meant: “Somos os pobres e injustiçados, mas somos também os verdadeiros e os bons.” Queiroz connects this argument to national identity. Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz, “Notas Sociológicas sobre o cangaço,” *Ciência e Cultura* 27: 5 (May 1975): 514.

As cabeças cortadas, os corpos de Lampião, Maria Bonita e outros bandoleiros deixados aos abutres, é um exemplo [of the lawlessness of the soldiers].⁵³⁵

Descriptions of violence discredited the reputation of the soldiers as exemplified by reports on the final expedition against Lampião at Angicos. Criminalist Wandenkolk Wanderly, a military official and declared lifetime opponent of cangaceiros, entered the discussion with a provocative lecture about his doubts as to how Lampião's band died.⁵³⁶ He claimed to have visited Sergipe shortly after the death of the cangaceiros in the famous battle of the Valley of Angicos. Wanderley stated that the povo had said that "Lampião e Maria Bonita ainda estrebuchavam, quando os soldados lhes cortaram as cabeças" because they were poisoned by the ex-comerciante and coiteiro Pedro Cândido.⁵³⁷ According to the testimonies of Cândido and a soldier who fought at Angicos, the already dead bodies were unearthed by the soldiers of João Bezerra's troop.

"Os soldados, como em festim macabre divertem-se metralhando os cadáveres, já apodrecidos. De repente, um deles identifica Maria Bonita, rasga-lhe a roupa e avança sobre os restos nus, enterrando uma planta de facheiro em sua vagina."⁵³⁸

⁵³⁵ Severino Barbosa, "Colecionar cabeças humanas é crime!" *Diario de Pernambuco* 19 Abril 1959, 14.

⁵³⁶ From oral history at CEHIBRA. Severino Barbosa, "Lampião e Maria Bonita foram envenenados" *Diario de Pernambuco* 25 Abril 1959.

⁵³⁷ Severino Barbosa, "Lampião e Maria Bonita foram envenenados" *Diario de Pernambuco* 25 Abril 1959.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

Violence initiated by the soldiers against the cangaceiros and the rural population was emphasized throughout this series of reports.⁵³⁹ The emphasis placed on the violence against women attacked the soldiers' honor.

At the same time, the life of the cangaceiro was not considered honorable either. One ex-cangaceiro, "Vinte Cinco," who worked as a civil guard for the Tribunal Regional Eleitoral in Maceió at the time of the interview, declared the time he spent in the cangaço was a nightmare.⁵⁴⁰ He refused to speak much about his past, stating that "por mais castigado fora da lei nunca é bem olhado pela sociedade, mesmo sabendo-se que, na sua maioria, os criminosos são vítimas do desequilíbrio social." Unlike the soldier de volante, the cangaceiro was depicted as a product of the culture and the unjust social structures. One soldier who fought against the cangaceiros for 20 years, Coronel Higinio José Belarmino, placed the fault of the cangaceiros on the large landowners:

Culpa os fazendeiros ricos do sertão, os "empresários" de cangaceiros, algumas vezes chefes políticos. Eram os homens poderosos que botavam delegados e juizes debaixo do braço. Para manter sua força, contratavam assassinos. Os cabras de sua confiança.

O lavrador pobre, por uma questão qualquer matava um sujeito. Corria para o alto das serras a se esconder. Perseguido, enfrentava a polícia. Marcado pela polícia, tinha que se refugiar no cangaço.

⁵³⁹ Another example of this appeared in a report in September with numerous photos depicting soldiers with cangaceiro heads at the "massacre of Angicos." Some of the soldiers denounced their colleagues, accusing them of crimes such as theft and murder: "Essa fase da história do Nordeste não foi negra, porque ficou marcado pelo sangue vermelho dos sertanejos." Severino Barbosa, "Final sangrento da epopéia do cangaço: morte de Lampião na Grota de Angicos," *Diário de Pernambuco*, 20 September 1959, 11.

⁵⁴⁰ Sosthenes Jambo, "É 'Barnabé', em Alagoas, um ex 'cabra' do grupo de Lampião" *Diário de Pernambuco*, 10 Maio 1959, 6, 2nd Cad.

Surgia então o protetor, o coiteiro, o cornelão, o fazendeiro, e o chamava para seu trabalho. Transformavam um homem que merecia castigo num bandido que devia ser morto.⁵⁴¹

According the article, this is how Coronel Higino faced the “problem of canagaceirismo” in the military campaigns against them for 20 years.

The blame placed on large landowners and unjust social structures for cangaceirismo is particularly interesting within the historical context of mid-1959. In rural Pernambuco, numerous land invasions occurred. Reports on rural violence and on the subversive nature of the Ligas Camponesas attempted to criminalize and delegitimize the push for agrarian reform. But, at this same time, the legal case for the expropriation of the engenho “Galiléia” moved forward. The power of the large landowner, the “latifundia,” was being questioned both in the past, as suggested by the series on the cangaceiro, and in the present, by the legal expropriation of “Galiléia” in January 1960 and the expansion of rural social movements fighting for radical agrarian reform.

In mid-May 1959, Francisco Julião, leader of the Ligas Camponesas, drew a connection between Lampião and the struggle for agrarian reform first in the state legislature and later in an interview with Severino Barbosa. While a state deputy was making arguments for making an appeal to the governor of Bahia to return the heads to the families, Julião supposedly interjected to state that Lampião was one of the main victims of the latifundiários because he had revolted against the “desumanos” large landowners. In the interview, Julião said that “Lampião foi o primeiro homem do nordeste, oprimido pela injustiça dos poderosos, a batalhar contra o latifundia e a

⁵⁴¹ Severino Barbosa, “Durante vinte anos perseguí Lampião” *Diário de Pernambuco*, 24 May 1959, 3.

arbitrariedade. Lampião teria sido um simbolo de resistencia.”⁵⁴² Julião effectively cast Lampião as a homem de guerrilhas and a symbol of resistance against the large landowners. The state’s use of the rural rebels’ bodies as a sign of disciplinary was met with resistance that challenged state laws—such as the right to private property and the limited political rights for illiterates—and turned the cangaceiro into a symbol of resistance.

The Cangaceiro and the Struggle for Agrarian Reform

In a 1963 series in *LIGA*, the newspaper of the Ligas Camponesas, an article on “cangaceiros” further described the statement that Julião made about Lampião in the Assembléia Legislativa. The article described the cangaceiro as a revolutionary figure in the past who fought against the latifundia, founding class struggle in Northeastern Brazil. According to this article, the cangaceiro:

era uma espécie de coluna revoltoso, que se fazia respeitar por todos quantos habitassam aquelas causticantes terras dos sertões de nossa pátria.

...Que queriam os cangaceiros?

Desmoralizar o então poder constituído, emplice do desajustamento social, da discriminação espoliativa imposta por uma minoria de privilegiados a maioria da população brasileira.

E era justamente por isso, que os governos eram impotentes para soffocar a rebêldia no Nordeste. Por mais de 30 anos, Lampião e o seu bando percorreram as terras da Bahia ao Ceará.

⁵⁴² Severino Barbosa, “Parlamento Pernambucano exige o sepultamento da cabeça de Lampião” *Diario de Pernambuco* 17 May 1959, 8.

...Os cangaceiros eram alvo de comentários da população que vez por outra era beneficiada com a ação confiscadora dos capitães Antônio Silvino e Lampeão. Quase sempre os cangaceiros não faziam mal ao povo, porque sua ira era contra o latifúndia.

Conta-se que muitas vezes, Antônio Silvino tomava aos ricos e distribuía aos pobres. Daí se conclui que mesmo de forma bandoleira, a luta dos cangaceiros tinha no fundamental, uma origem de classe.

As forças do govêrno que perseguiram os bandidos foram cúmplices de inúmeras atrocidades. Pelo fato de serem constantemente logrados, pela tática dos bandidos, os soldados descarregavam sua raiva, cometendo as maiores perversidades contra a pacata população sertaneja. A presença do govêrno dava motivo ao desespero de todo o povo. Diz-se que os soldados eram mais bandidos do que os cangaceiros da região.⁵⁴³

This example shows how the history of Lampião was interpreted by the leaders of the Ligas Camponesas: a hero, a Robin Hood, and a rebel who fought against the dominant class. In this section of the paper, I describe how the Ligas Camponesas and the PCB—groups on the political left that were actively involved in the struggle for agrarian reform in the late 1950s and early 1960s and that faced repression following the military coup in 1964 -- used and interpreted the symbol of the cangaceiro. Through this symbol, it is possible to perceive some of the underlying differences between the Ligas and the PCB in terms of how leaders used the image of the cangaceiro to mobilize the rural population and to define the objectives of agrarian reform.

In a letter to the Brazilian Minister of War written in 1962, Francisco Julião described the rebellious nature of the peasant. “When he rebels he becomes a Zumbi or Balaio or Cabano, or Antônio Conselheiro, Felipe dos Santos, Antonio Sílvinio or Lampião; and then he is written off as a bandit or fanatic threatening the latifúndia

⁵⁴³ “Brasil por dentro: Os Cangaceiros” *LIGA* 11 September 1963, 5.

and the “Christian” family, law, order and everything else corrupt; but he becomes a ray of hope for the poor; a revenger for the crimes which are visited on him from the day of his birth.”⁵⁴⁴ According to Julião, similar to other historic figures, the cangaceiro symbolized resistance against the latifundia. The cangaceiro, for Julião, was not just a part of history but a historic symbol that continued to fuel revolutionary sentiment in the countryside. Thus, the symbol was useful for mobilizing camponeses to fight for radical agrarian reform, a reform project defined by the slogan of the Ligas: “Reforma agrária, pela lei ou pela marra.” Furthermore, as repeated in numerous speeches and articles, the “true” history of the cangaceiros had yet to be written. The history of the cangaceiro (and of Brazil) had only been told by the dominant classes and this elite history described the cangaceiros as bandits and violent outlaws. According to Julião, Brazilian peasants had a different version of history.

Volta Sêca, an ex-cangaceiro, explained in an interview in *Liga* that “Lampião was a protector of the poor against the injustice of the coroneis.” In this article the cangaceiro was likened to the Ligas Camponesas and to the Cuban or Chinese guerrilheiro, demonstrating the connection between regional history, the struggle for land in the 1950s and 1960s, and revolutionary movements of this period.⁵⁴⁵ Volta

⁵⁴⁴ Francisco Julião, *Cambão - The Yoke: The Hidden Face of Brazil* (Penguin): 144-145.

⁵⁴⁵ “Volta Sêca: Um Guerreiro em repouso. Entrevista com Jorge Brandão (Exclusiva para “Liga”),” *LIGA* 20 November 1962, 5. This contrasts with interviews in mainstream publications such as the *Diário de Pernambuco*, which emphasized the detest ex-cangaceiros felt for the time of the cangaço.

Sêca's history of the cangaço supposedly supported the oral traditions dominant in the rural Northeast. As Volta Sêca described:

“Havia respeito, respeito com tudo e por todos, para a gente também ser respeitado. Esse negócio de dizer que o bando violentava moças nunca aconteceu. Basta saber o caso do velho Justino, conhecido no bando como Pai Velho. Este homem entrou para o cangaço com seu filho, de nome Arvoredo, para se vingar da voltante comandada pelo sargento Otaviano, que, a pretexto de dar combate a Lampião, invadiu a casa do velho, matando e desrespeitando sua mulher e filhas, depois de obrigarem as pobres moças a se despirem e marchar com canga no curral. Esse velho bondoso morreu na cadeia.”

Hoje, a vingança do camponês, quando vê sua filha deflorada pelo latifundiário ou o filho marcado com o ferro em brasa pelo capanga do coronel, é entrar na Liga. E se ontem o cangaço aumentava com a violência da volante, hoje, as arbitrariedades cometidas pela polícia e pelo exército aumentam os quadros revolucionários das Ligas.

According to the article, the official history described Lampião as a bandit and mercenary, but this official history was simply the case of the real criminal transferring the blame for the crime to the accused. “Today the usineiros of Pernambuco order the cane fields burned and then blame the Ligas for the fire. (...) The militaristic North-Americans attack Cuba in many different ways and then claim that they are threatened by Cuban aggression.” Those with power—the large landowners, the United States—use their power to blame the less powerful—the peasant, Cuba—for the crimes committed by the powerful.

This power also had a static quality. According to the article, the methods of repression by the dominant classes remained the same. “O exército invade a sede das Ligas, toma a espingarda pica-pau do camponês e faz vista grossa para os verdadeiros arsenais de armas de guerra conservados pelos latifundiários.” Furthermore, the official history, or history told by the dominant classes, has always excluded the subaltern version of history. The official history and the tactics for repressing the

peasants maintained the legitimacy and the power of dominant classes. But, the article claims that the “consciousness” of the peasant had “developed” since the time of the cangaço. Since the peasants had learned new forms of resistance and better tactics for confronting the police and military, they were now a threat to the dominant classes, the official history and the tactics for repressing struggles for change.

The “new” consciousness and tactics of the peasants fell somewhere between the struggle of the cangaceiros and the struggle of Cuban and Chinese revolutionaries. The article describes how the cangaceiros had used *nom-de-guerre* to protect their families from persecution, as in Cuba. This article also detailed similarities between guerrilha tactics since Lampião was a strategic genius who had used guerrilha tactics in battles, tactics frequently used in China and Cuba, that Mao Tse-Tung and Che Guevara called “cerco e aniquila mento” and “minueto.” And the consciousness described by Volta Sêca in his recollections of the famous encounter between Lampião’s band and the Prestes Column, was interpreted as having much in common with the idealized revolutionary consciousness of the peasant. Volta-Sêca claimed that the cangaceiros never fought the Prestes Column because they had the same enemy. From this statement, the reader was instructed: “Observa-se o sentido de classe de estratégia (unidade contra o inimigo comum), e a compreensão natural e singelamente dialética da tática de luta (a frente única como resultado prático do processo revolucionário, brotando das próprias circunstancias materias.)” Volta Sêca was held up as an ex-cangaceiro who was not only a part of history but a part of the present. As the author concluded, as is the case of Euclides da Cunha’s “bronzed Titans,” the warriors of the Nordeste did not disappear. The peace that supposedly

existed after the “disappearance” of the cangaceiros was the “filha de guerra, guerra dos humildes contra os opressores e tiranos.”

Even though the elite classes, the U.S., and some Communist Party members labeled the Ligas Camponesas as “communist,” Francisco Julião’s use of the cangaceiro conflicted with the views of the Communist Party. The Brazilian Communist Party saw the cangaceiro as a hindrance to the social revolution and progress that necessary for Northeastern Brazil. In the PCB’s linear and progressive history, the cangaceiro was a rebellious figure that was a reaction to unjust landholdings. The cangaceiro no longer existed because history had progressed and the nature of rural conflicts had changed. For instance, in one article in the PCB newspaper *Novos Rumos*, the author refers to the time of the cangaceiros to describe how certain types of violence no longer exist (the cangaceiro) but others remain (the latifundia). Commenting on the violent shootout at the Engenho Estrelana, the author claims:

Já se foram os tempos em que as injustices, praticadas contra os camponeses, os arrastavam ao crime e à formação de bandos de salteadores como o de Lampeão. Hoje, a miséria que asola a nossa população rústica, as injustiças praticadas pelos donos da terra conduzem os camponeses, inevitavelmente, para as Ligas, para os Sindicatos Rurais e outras formas de organização. Os trabalhadores rurais estão aprendendo com os trabalhadores da indústria de que, somente a organização pode libertá-los do jugo do latifúndio, da exploração desumana dos senhores feudais das usinas e dos engenhos de Pernambuco.⁵⁴⁶

At the same time, the actual historical conflict between Lampião’s band and the Prestes Column must be taken into consideration since the PCB had strong ties

⁵⁴⁶ “Latifundiários e governo contra os camponeses,” *A Hora* 19 – 26 January 1963, 1.

with Luis Carlos Prestes.⁵⁴⁷ Rui Facó, a central figure and reporter for the Communist Party newspaper *Novos Rumos*, published a series of articles on Northeastern Brazil as well as an influential book, *Cangaceiros e Fanáticos* before his tragic death in Bolivia in 1963. These publications illustrate general Communist Party views on the cangaceiro in relation to the rural activism of the 1960s.

Rui Facó traveled throughout Northeastern Brazil starting in late 1960, producing a few different series of reports on the culture of *o Nordeste* and on the Ligas Camponesas. As a whole, the articles described the cangaceiro as a type primitive rebellion in the past. For example, in a book review of the Russian preface to “Cangaceiros” (a Russian translation of José Lins do Rego’s “Cangaceiros”), Facó criticizes the Russian scholar’s interpretation of the cangaceiro:

...o cangaceirismo, embora tendo em sua origem a revolta espontânea contra uma ordem de coisas terrivelmente injusta, a nada conduziu as massas camponesas exploradas e oprimidas. Ao contrário, os bandos de Lampião, Antônio Silvino, Luis Padre, Corsico e tantos e tantos outros degeneraram em simples salteadores e assassinos. Colocaram-se invariavelmente a serviço de latifundiários, na luta renhidas entre estes. (...)

O que condenamos no cangaceirismo não é apenas a violência pela violência, mas também não ter em conta o verdadeiro estado de espírito das massas camponesas; estar desligado de todo movimento popular e da luta pela terra ou simplesmente contra a exploração feudal: é a sua ausência de ideologia e, portanto, de consequência, de objetivos claros e definidos, de classe; é a degenerescência do cangaceiro em lumpen. O cangaço tem apenas um elemento positivo:

⁵⁴⁷ One of the main reasons for the split in the Partidão (PCB) and the emergence of the PC do B (Partido Comunista do Brasil) was related to the PCB’s close ties to Prestes. The PCB was labeled the “Partido de Prestes.” Jean Rodrigues Sales, “O Partido Comunista do Brasil nos anos sessenta: estruturação orgânica e atuação política,” in *Cadernos AEL: Tempo de ditadura do golpe de 1964 aos anos 1970* v.8, n. 14/15 (2001): 32.

o sentimento de revolta que o gerá. Traduz de início esse sentimento.
Mas logo a seguir o trai, pois sua ação é cega.⁵⁴⁸

Facó explained that while the cangaceiro was a “stage” of guerrilha, it lacked a “centro director” or a “núcleo-matriz” to orientate the actions of rebellion. The cangaceiro was only interested in attacking other bands, or assaulting certain fazendas and thus lacked a “revolutionary spirit.”

Emphasizing the cangaceiro’s place in history, Facó reported that literatura de cordel was supposedly losing popularity because younger generations were no longer interested in stories about cangaceiros. The younger generation wanted to know about the Soviet Union and educational programs and scholarships for students from Brazil. According to Facó, this proved that Nordestinos were “firmamente decidida” to take control of their own future.⁵⁴⁹ The Ligas Camponesas were headed in the right direction since leader Francisco Julião’s revolutionary consciousness had “evolved” through the struggle, from a sentimental spirit to a revolutionary one.⁵⁵⁰ Facó’s articles on the Ligas, focus on the “evolutionary” nature of the social movement, also exemplified through the case of one rural worker who “progressed” from being Protestant, to Catholic, to Ligas member:

⁵⁴⁸ Rui Facó, “Reparos a um prefácio de livro brasileiro na URSS” *Novos Rumos* no. 85. 14 a 20 October 1960, p.5 2nd caderno.

⁵⁴⁹ Rui Facó, “Os velhos cantam nas feiras os jovens querem Moscou,” *Novos Rumos*, 7 a 13 October 1960, 1, 2nd caderno.

⁵⁵⁰ Rui Facó, “Julião: Eu não inventei as Ligas. Elas são a flor que se abre no lôdo.” *Novos Rumos*, 27 janeiro a 2 fevereiro 1961, 1, 2nd. caderno. Note that the article was written in 1961. A decided rupture occurred in 1962 in the PCB, creating the PC do B and conflicts between the PCB and the Ligas. Also, upon his death, Facó was described by “Julião” as a “friend” of the Ligas.

-- Eu era até Protestante. Desde esse dia deixei...

-- E agora tu es católico—perguntei-lhe outro com ironia. --- O senhor de engenho é católico...

-- Eu agora sou das Ligas! -- responde, com firmeza, segura de haver encontrado um novo caminho.⁵⁵¹

In *Cangaceiros e Fanáticos*, Facó argues that the cangaceiro arose as a reaction to the unequal and unjust the socioeconomic system in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵⁵² Although the problems that existed earlier such as drought, hunger, and semi-slave labor relations had not changed, the cangaceiro had disappeared because of emigration, which served as an escape valve for Nordestinos who continued to suffer from such problems. The “rural exodus” provided the mechanism by which the rural elite maintained their dominance and the status quo. Facó argued against the biological claims of nordestinos being predisposed to criminality made by Nina Rodrigues and Euclides da Cunha. Even though the rural poor did not know what they were rebelling for, they knew that what they were rebelling against which was the power of the latifúndia. The repression by the police against the rural population was supposedly much worse than the violence by the cangaceiros. In the 1920s, thousands of cangaceiros and rural poor were killed by the police in the “civil war” that was a class struggle even though those fighting were unconscious of the fact.⁵⁵³ Facó concludes the study with a brief analysis of the Ligas Camponesas, rural associations expanding throughout Brasil, “dando sinal de uma

⁵⁵¹ Rui Facó, “Julião: Eu não inventei as Ligas. Elas são a flor que se abre no lôdo.” *Novos Rumos*, 27 janeiro a 2 fevereiro 1961, 1 2nd. caderno. This example also illustrates the position of the PCB on religion, a topic to be further addressed in a separate chapter.

⁵⁵² Rui Facó, *Cangaceiros e Fanáticos: gênese e lutas* (Rio: Civilização Brasileiro, 1976 [1963]).

⁵⁵³ Ibid., 186-187.

efervescência inédita entre as massas rurais pobres” and causing concern to the latifundiários. Why? “Porque os pobres do campo dispõem hoje da mais poderosa das armas, uma que não possuíam antes: vão ganhando consciência de sua situação de míseros explorados e oprimidos e organizam-se como jamais se organizaram os trabalhadores do campo no Brasil. Esta consciência e organização lhes valem como um penhor de vitória.”⁵⁵⁴

Conclusion: A Return to the Heads

In 1965, Estácio de Lima published a book entitled *O mundo estranho dos cangaceiros (ensaio bio-sociológico)*, dedicated to all those who wrote about the “cruel drama of the Northeast.”⁵⁵⁵ The book described the sertão as an uncivilized region, a place where violent people lived barbarically and grotesquely. Lima claimed that Lampião’s “sexual sadism” was connected to the topography of the sertão, because sertanejos do not know the beauty of green vistas or the productivity of land. As a comparison, Lima raised the Sicilian and Chicago mafia, and cowboys of the “wild west,” although Lima believed the cangaceiro was most like a caveman because of the cangaceiro’s violent nature and his failure to be disciplined or to respond to repression.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., 216.

⁵⁵⁵ Estácio de Lima, *O mundo estranho dos cangaceiros (ensaio bio-sociológico)* (Salvador: Editora Itapoã Ltda, 1965).

Also in 1965, a social movement arose to mobilize family members of the cangaceiros whose heads remained on display to acquire the right to bury the heads. A law was proposed in 1965, connected to the University of Brasília (the conferences of poet Euclides Formiga), and the Catholic Church.⁵⁵⁶ On 24 May 1965, the National Congress passed a decree stating that the heads on display at the Instituto Nina Rodrigues should be buried 15 days after the publication of the law. The University of Bahia and Director of the Instituto were responsible for ensuring a burial in a Christian cemetery. The decree prohibited the “exibição de órgãos do corpo humano de pessoas mortas, com objectivo lucrativo, ou mesmo científico, cabendo punição de 5 a 10 anos de reclusão ao responsável ou aos responsáveis pela transgressão desta lei.”⁵⁵⁷ According to Grunspan-Jasmin, the new dictatorship wanted to make it absolutely clear that “archaic” methods of repression would no longer take place in Brazil, and that in prohibiting such shows of punishment, Brazil had arrived at an “advanced stage of social evolution.”⁵⁵⁸ And with the military’s strategy of torture, imprisonment, murder and disappearance of thousands of Brazilian citizens during the dictatorship, it is clear that a “social evolution” did not mean less violence or repression, simply different means and methods.

But, the saga continued: the heads were not buried 15 days later. In 1967, the *Diario de Pernambuco* returned to publish reports on the heads. Corisco’s son, dr. Silvino Hermano Bulhões, made a statement at the III Convenção da Camaras Junior

⁵⁵⁶ Semira Adler Vainsencher, “Lampião (Virgulino Ferreira da Silva), <http://www.fundaj.gov.br:8080/notitia/servlet/newstorm.ns.presentation.NavigationServlet?publicationCode=16&pageCode=308&textCode=976&date=currentDate>. Accessed: 7 September 2005.

⁵⁵⁷ Grunspan-Jasmin, *Lampião*, 347.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 348.

in São Paulo in which he attacked Dr. Estácio de Lima's right to continue to hold the heads as "macabre trophies" in the name of science.⁵⁵⁹ Not until 1969, shortly after the instatement of Ato Institucional número 5 (AI-5) and the shift in the military regime to a heightened state of repression and limitation of political rights, were the cangaceiro heads released for burial. Interestingly enough, the heads were released around the time of carnaval (February) and, at least in the *Diario de Pernambuco*, the burials received almost no press coverage.⁵⁶⁰ Neither incident can be considered strange in light of the context since military officials understood the power of the cangaceiro as a symbol of rebellion and resistance as well as injustice for much of the rural population. At the same time, keeping the heads on display illustrated the "backwardness" that the military's promises of progress and modernization were supposed to have eliminated.

The burial of the heads did not end the debate about the circumstances of Lampião's death. In 1970, the Pernambuco state tourism organization, EMPETUR, conducted a study interviewing ex-cangaceiros to discover the "true" history of the cangaço. In one interview, ex-cangaceiro João Circinato stated that Lampião just died recently (in 1970), and that he was not assassinated in 1938. According to Circinato, Lampião's head was not one of the heads that had been cut off. Lampião had escaped to Goiás. One of the members of Lampião's band, Luiz de Triangulo, had told Circinato Lampião was still alive. As Circinato described,

⁵⁵⁹ "Tempo destrói cabeças dos cangaceiros expostas na Bahia," *Diario de Pernambuco* 5 November 1967, p. 3.

⁵⁶⁰ For a newspaper that had been involved in the campaign to return the heads and bury them for at least ten years, it appears odd that the victory was not covered in the paper. Only a few short blurbs were published on the burials.

“Oxem, quem mata Lampião nunca. Ele brigava quando queria. Ele tinha coiteiros, tinha onde se esconder. Aí ele conversou com o tenente quem queria deixar aquela vida, tinha pra onde ir e quera abandonar o cangaço. Aí o tenente disse, ‘Tem geito.’ Você manda comprá carne. Eu mando a carne envenenada. Quando eles tiveram de comer da carne—e você fora, não coma da carne—quando eles tiverem distentados, eu aí cerco, mato tudinho e você tá fora pode se aforriar.”⁵⁶¹

Even a well-known scholar of the cangaço, Algae Lima de Oliveira, claimed in 1974 that Lampião was living in the north of Bahia, “com 79 anos, magro, cabeludo e rigorosamente protegido por cães.”⁵⁶² As the cordel explains, Lampião was expelled from heaven and hell, and so he must be still in the sertão.

The next chapter examines another type of “psychologically demented human type” associated with the sertão and Northeastern Brazil: the religious fanatic.

Figures such as Antonio Conselheiro have often been associated with Lampião and the cangaceiros; in fact, if it had not been for a fire in 1905 in the Instituto, Antonio Conselheiro’s decaying head would have been on display next to the cangaceiros’ heads. The religious fanatic yet another symbol that holds multiple meanings, and that entered into the discourse of redefining the Northeast in the 1950s and 1960s.

⁵⁶¹ Interview with João Circinato about *Memórias do Tempo do Cangaço*, by Olímpio Bonald Neto for the Museu da Imagem e do Som, EMPETUR, 12 Janeiro 1970, 8. (Museu do Cangaço, Truinfo, Pernambuco).

⁵⁶² “Professora acredita que Lampião esteja vivo e vai procurá-lo na Bahia,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 5 September 1974, 10.

Chapter 6: From the Memory of Messianic Wars to a Radical Jesus

Growing up in rural Oregon in the 1980s, I was surrounded by what many would classify as messianic movements or religious cult settlements, as well as by communes and a certain degree of religious fanaticism. For years, I associated sushi with religious cults since the only Japanese restaurant in town was “Roy Masters” and thus declared “off-limits” by my family.⁵⁶³ A neighboring town, Ruch, was entirely devoted to a Christian cult with a mega church and community that existed in relative isolation to the rest of Southern Oregon. The commune of Takilma, an independent community located deep in the mountains, where poverty and a booming marijuana industry attracted hippies eager to follow an alternative lifestyle, going as far to create their own “state” composed of the western regions of Southern Oregon and Northern California with the intention to secede from the nation. And, the Rajneesh established a cult ashram in Antelope, Oregon, known as “Rajneesheeville,” with followers dressed in orange garb who became a major news story, were labeled a “sex cult,” and later were linked to using salmonella strains to poison neighboring communities.

So, in some ways, I have a personal familiarity with the type of cult followings associated with poor rural areas that offer followers promises of a life different from that which mainstream society can provide. I also heard and believed

⁵⁶³ Roy Masters is a charismatic evangelist whose “Foundation of Human Understanding” or “Hypnosis” was labeled a “cult,” described in the media and by scholars as devoted to the denigration and submission of women, exorcisms, and its attempt to take over my hometown of Grants Pass, Oregon in the 1980s.

the mainstream criticisms of these settlements. I associated such communities with poverty, violence such as sexual molestation, drug use, skepticism of the power of the charismatic leaders, and in general, a sense that these communities were abnormal. In this respect, it is easy to understand the fear and skepticism that many Brazilians felt toward the messianic or religious communities of Canudos, Pedra Bonita, Padre Cicero's Juazeiro do Norte, and the other small foci of folk religion in the backlands of Northeastern Brazil. But, what is drastically different is the resonating power that messianic movements assert on regional identity. Few people in the United States would commonly identify Oregon or the Pacific Northwest with religious cults. But, many Brazilians envision Canudos and Antonio Conselheiro, Padre Cicero, and poor religious pilgrims roaming the backlands when they think of Northeastern Brazil. One of the significant reasons for this difference lies in the importance of historical narratives of messianic movements in Northeastern Brazil, which encouraged a proliferation of scholarly and cultural productions drawing a connection between rural Northeastern Brazil and religious fanaticism.

The power of such representations clearly stems from Euclides da Cunha's famous Brazilian epic, *Os sertões* (*Rebellion in the Backlands*, 1902) and the representations of this narrative in film and popular culture. Da Cunha's positivist account of the destruction of a millenarian community in the interior of Bahia in the early years of the Brazilian Republic described how topography and miscegenation had combined to create a "backwards" population. In *Os sertões*, the "fanatic" followers fought to the death against state militias and federal troops in defense of their community and leader. An immediate classic, versions of this story have been

repeated in folktales, novels, theatrical productions, carnival performances and even soap operas, collectively working to construct a mythical identity of the Nordeste and the Nordestino. A particular strand of da Cunha's story – the Nordestino as a barbaric, immiserated pathogen amidst the civilizing nation – was later reinforced by elite novels and scholarly works in the 1930s and 40s. And yet, certain passages of da Cunha's account have been open to multiple interpretations; for instance, the idea of the sertanejo as a strong and brave fighter able to win numerous battles against the Brazilian Armed Forces provides a powerful image for Northeastern resistance broadly speaking. For instance, the tragedy of the community's annihilation by the military also fueled resistance against the Brazilian military in the late 1970s and early 1980s.⁵⁶⁴

A great deal of the scholarship produced on Northeastern Brazil focuses on the studies of Canudos and messianic movements, reinforcing the connection between regional identity and messianism. The extensive historiography falls into a number of overlapping categories, some of which will be addressed in greater detail throughout the chapter.⁵⁶⁵ One theme of this scholarship is the reception and interpretations of Euclides da Cunha's *Os sertões*, illustrating how this particular account has formed

⁵⁶⁴ A number of theater plays, cultural groups and filmmakers as well as scholars used the theme of Canudos to portray the violence of the Brazilian military during the abertura (1979-1985).

⁵⁶⁵ A number of historiographical essays and reviews describe the state of the scholarship on Canudos including Lori Madden, "The Canudos War in History," *Luso-Brazilian Review* 30, no. 2 (Winter 1993): 5-22; Lori Madden, "Evolution in the Interpretations of the Canudos Movement: An Evaluation of the Social Sciences," *Luso-Brazilian Review* 28, no. 1 (Summer 1991): 59-75. The *Luso-Brazilian Review* has published a number of special issues on this topic as well.

changing interpretations of the Northeast and of the Brazilian nation.⁵⁶⁶ Other scholars focus on the historical analysis of the figure of Antonio Conselheiro or the War of Canudos itself, in an attempt to separate the “history” from Euclides da Cunha’s account.⁵⁶⁷ Another historiographical debate defines Canudos within the literature on messianism or millenarianism, debating whether Canudos was a global phenomenon or a peculiar feature of Northeastern society.⁵⁶⁸ Within this debate, some have argued that Canudos resulted from the social and economic inequalities, while others see Canudos as a response to foreign imperialism or to the newly instated Republican government that supposedly threatened traditional Northeastern culture.⁵⁶⁹ Canudos has also been incorporated into a Marxist or materialist

⁵⁶⁶ Among others: Regina Abreu, *O enigma de Os Sertões* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco/FUNARTE, 1998); Adriana M.C. Johnson, “Subalternizing Canudos,” *MLN* 20 (2005): 355-382; Walnice Nogueira Galvão, *No calor da hora: A Guerra de Canudos nos jornais, 4a expedição* (São Paulo: Atica, 1974); Frederic Amory, “Historical Source and Biographical Context in the Interpretation of Euclides da Cunha’s *Os Sertões*,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28, n. 3 (Oct., 1996): 667-685; Maria Zilda Ferreira Cury, “*Os Sertões*, de Euclides da Cunha: Espaços,” *Luso-Brazilian Review* 41, no. 1 (2004): 71-79.

⁵⁶⁷ Robert Levine, *Vale of Tears: Revisiting the Massacre in Northeastern Brazil, 1893-1897* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Ralph Della Cava, “Brazilian Messianism and National Institutions: A Reappraisal of Canudos and Joazeiro,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 48, no. 3 (August 1968): 402-420.

⁵⁶⁸ On Canudos as a global messianic phenomenon: Sylvia L. Thrupp, ed., *Millennial Dreams in Action* (Hague: Mouton and Co., 1962). On Canudos as a reaction to Northeastern culture and inequalities: Sue Anderson Gross, “Religious Sectarianism in the ‘Sertão’ of Northeastern Brazil,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies* 10, no. 3 (July 1968): 11-27. Hermann argues that Canudos must be interpreted as part of both local and national changes, Jacqueline Hermann, “Religião e política no alvorecer da República: os movimentos de Juazeiro, Canudos, e Contestado,” in *O Brasil Republicano: O tempo do liberalismo excludente da Proclamação da República à Revolução de 1930*. Eds., Jorge Ferreira and Lucilia de Almeida Neves Delgado. vol. 1 of 4 (Rio: Civilização Brasileira, 2003):121-160.

⁵⁶⁹ Patricia Pessar argued that Canudos arose as a rejection of the new Republic. Patricia Pessar, “Revolution, Salvation, Extermination: The Future of Millenarianism in Brazil,” in *Predicting Social Change*, Susan Abbott and John van Willigen, eds.,

interpretation as a “primitive” or nascent form of social rebellion based on class struggle and some scholars have suggested that Canudos was part of the long history in the struggle for agrarian reform in Brazil.⁵⁷⁰ More recent scholarship has shown how notions of popular millenarianism have changed over time in the Northeast, as a part of the narrative of modernity.⁵⁷¹ A number of scholars have examined the cultural productions on Canudos in film, literature, song, and popular poetry.⁵⁷² Similar to the case of the *cangaceiro*, I argue that it is impossible to separate the historical reality from the representations that constitute the meaning of Canudos.

With few exceptions, most Brazilian films on Northeastern Brazil incorporate the image of folk religions, messianic movements, and *romeiros* traversing the dry backlands. Versions of Euclides da Cunha’s narrative have been retold in film such as Wilson Silva *Nordeste Sangrento* (Bloody Northeast, 1962); Glauber Rocha *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* (*Black God, White Devil*, 1963); Ruy Guerra, *Os Fuzís* (The Guns, 1964); Fernando de Barros, *Riacho de Sangue* (Creek of Blood, 1967); Sérgio Ricardo, *A noite do espantalho* (The Night of the Scarecrow, 1974); Ipojuca Pontes,

(Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980): 95-114. Maria Isaura Pereira de Queiroz looks at the connection between Canudos and coronelismo, *O messianismo no Brasil e no mundo* (São Paulo: Dominus, 1965) as does Shepard Forman, *The Brazilian Peasantry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975).

⁵⁷⁰ Rui Facó, *Cangaceiros e fanáticos* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1963); Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1959); Edmundo Moniz, *Canudos: A luta pela terra* (São Paulo: Global Editora, 1997); Renato Mocellin, *Canudos: Fanatismo ou a luta pela terra?* (São Paulo: Editora do Brasil, 1989).

⁵⁷¹ Patricia Pessar, *From Fanatics to Folk: Brazilian Millenarianism and Popular Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); José Maria de Oliveira Silva, “Rever Canudos: Historiicidade e Religiosidade Popular (1940-1995),” (PhD diss., Universidade de São Paulo, 1996).

⁵⁷² Paulo Emílio Matos Martins, *A reinvenção do sertão* (Rio de Janeiro: FGV Editora, 2001); Candace Slater, “Messianism and the Padre Cícero Stories,” *Luso-Brazilian Review* 28, no. 1 (Summer 1991): 117-127.

Canudos (1976); Jorge Furtado, *A matadeira* (The Killing Machine, 1994); Sérgio Rezende *A Guerra de Canudos* (The War of Canudos, 1997). Images of Northeastern “folk” religion also appear in Anselmo Duarte’s *O pagador de promessas* (The Given Word, 1962), Glauber Rocha’s *Barravento* (The Turning Wind, 1962), João Ramiro Mello and Vladimir Carvalho’s documentary *Romeiros da Guia* (1962); Paulo Gil Soares’s *Frei Damião* (1969); Geraldo Sarno’s *Viva Cariri* (1969), and there are scenes of pilgrims (romeiros) in most of the Northeastern productions. The presence and repetition of messianic images and themes in films about Northeastern Brazil have bolstered certain ideas about the type of religious activity associated with the region.⁵⁷³ Part of the challenge is to understand the meanings of such representations in the Cold War historical context.

In a study on US media representations of “fringe” religious groups, Sean McCloud argues that media representations of non-mainstream religious groups

⁵⁷³ Out of sheer curiosity, I traveled to Juazeiro do Norte filled with preconceived notions of what I was going to find: the weathered beatas circling the feet of the enormous statue of Padre Cicero, romeiros dressed in rags wandering the streets carrying crosses and filling the churches, paying their respect to “meu padinho,” set to the constant ongoing background music of romeiros chanting. While I did notice what seemed to be extreme poverty and a disproportionate number of maimed beggars in comparison with other towns in the sertão, I did not find the beatas cloaked in black mumbling their prayers to their declared saint, (although this is not to say that at other times of the year, this scene does not unfold). What surprised me was the large number of “modern” homes with swimming pools and the air-conditioned modern mall, guarded by the typical men-with-machine-guns. When I climbed past the stations of the cross in the sun of the sertão to reach the top of the “holy” hill and the feet of the Padre Cicero statue, I read the pamphlets explaining the prayers and traditions, but the only other people at the illustrious Padre’s feet that day were a young man and young woman in a mini-skirt passionately making out. I realized that I too had been caught in the trap of reading the representations as reality. This was a place, like any other, where believers came to worship and kids came to make-out. People were poor, but they were not the images the mass media and films depicted of the “fanatic” place of Juazeiro do Norte in Northeastern Brazil.

changed during the Cold War. Comparable to imagery of Northeastern Brazil's "fanatics," McCloud argues that during the 1950s and early 1960s, "members of fringe religions were seldom portrayed individually, but instead namelessly grouped as indistinguishable, often fanatical 'true believers' in mass movements. Promoting a broad American cultural consensus that stood apart from 'godless' communism, news and general-interest magazines occasionally portrayed marginalized religious groups as having those characteristics least suitable for sustaining representative democratic capitalism."⁵⁷⁴ McCloud claims that a "common Cold War trope" was to locate the religious fringe as identified with a certain region of the United States.⁵⁷⁵ McCloud also claims that the concept of "brainwashing" and the idea that opposition groups labeled "enemies" of the U.S. nation – such as the Nation of Islam – was a Cold War tactic in distinguishing the national "we" from the subversive "them."⁵⁷⁶ Similar to Northeastern Brazil's fanatics, the idea of the religious Other in the U.S. was broad enough to encompass white, middle-class Californians (regional) and black, urban militants (racial). The media depicted these groups as non-mainstream, subversive, and as a threat to an imagined homogenous nation. As McCloud argues, such representations fit into the broader Cold War containment discourse in the U.S., which drew connections between communism, (political/social/cultural) difference, and the metaphor of germs and disease.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁴ Sean McCloud, *Making the American Religious Fringe: Exotics, Subversives and Journalists, 1955-1993* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 3.

⁵⁷⁵ McCloud argues that in the 1950s and early 1960s, the Northeast media in the U.S. identified the religious fringe with California, and the "exotic cults." Ibid., 33.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., 52-68.

⁵⁷⁷ McCloud draws from Elaine Tyler May's study on the Cold War's influence on gender relations and the idea of the "home." Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound:*

The images of messianic movements and Canudos are not stable, or do not consistently signify only backwardness, social illness, and a threat to the Brazilian nation.⁵⁷⁸ As this chapter explains, numerous meanings surrounded Canudos in the 1950s and 1960s, with the interpretation of Canudos as the predecessor to the struggle for agrarian reform introduced during these years. But, this chapter is not solely about representations of messianic movements such as Canudos or Padre Cícero. It is also about how religion entered into the social and cultural struggles during the Cold War in Northeastern Brazil. To understand how such ideas of religion shaped Northeastern identity, it is necessary to examine the struggles that took place over the meanings of the representations⁵⁷⁹ as well as to recognize the political role that religious leaders – such as Catholic priests – played in these struggles. The grouping together of messianic movements with the Catholic and Protestant Churches is a superficial categorization; in fact, many institutional religious leaders strongly opposed any type of “folk” religion.⁵⁸⁰ But, the point of this chapter is to understand how religion and religious identities influenced the struggle for land and regional

American Families in the Age of the Cold War (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). McCloud, *Making the American Religious Fringe*, 37-45.

⁵⁷⁸ Patricia Pessar’s work on Pedra Bonita shows how the idea of messianism has changed over time. Pessar, *From Fanatics to Folk*.

⁵⁷⁹ Bourdieu, “Identity and Representation.”

⁵⁸⁰ While the categorization of “religion” is superficial, this also has to do with the perspective of the people involved. For instance, whereas the official Catholic Church would see any type of connection between the Church and messianic movements as completely at odds, this would not necessarily be the case for rural people who would see the two as similar or even as the same. Francisco Julião’s appropriation of Biblical passages, in some cases, would be understood as competing with the official Church doctrine as would some of the more radical priests’ teachings and political activism. For this reason, I decided to integrate “religion” broadly defined in this chapter, since it is a key component of Northeastern regional identity but is not necessarily attached to one religious belief or institution.

identity formation.

This chapter looks at how a number of different groups and individuals used religion – broadly defined – as a way to legitimize their political projects. Religion has always shaped Northeastern identity, but the point of this chapter is to understand the contestations over religious symbols and narratives in the context of the Cold War in Brazil. The Ligas Camponesas used biblical passages and messages, and also incorporated radical Catholic priests and Protestants as spokesmen. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Catholic Church created a new discourse of the “Salvation of the Northeast.” In the early 1960s, the Catholic Church’s Federations of Rural Workers and SORPE challenged the dominance of the Ligas and the PCB in the rural syndicate movement. At the same time, Catholic “Anti-Communists” used the Church to oppose agrarian reform. The focus on the Church in this chapter also allows for a deeper investigation into the military period (1964-1985) since the Church unions were the only rural social movement that survived into the dictatorship (after a three month suspension). But, at the same time, the association with the Northeast as a place of “devious” or “radical” religious beliefs and practices helped justify the repression of priests and Catholic activists who denounced military rule. The chapter looks at regional identity formation in the Northeast starting with representations in popular culture of religion and messianism, followed by a description of how the Ligas used religious figures and history in their struggle, and it ends with a discussion of how the Catholic Church entered into this process of regional identity formation during the Cold War.

Fanatics in Popular Culture

The religious fanatic is a definitive figure of Northeastern film. The place of the messianic movement is central in Brazilian national cinema, and as a trope is unrivaled in other national film industries. Unlike the slave or the cangaceiro, which are more universal symbols that have equivalents in other national film industries, the messianic movement and romeiros traversing the backlands are particular to Brazilian film.⁵⁸¹ Many scholars and cultural critics tie the figures or symbols of the fanatic and the cangaceiro together, because they often are depicted together to make up the imagined place of the Northeast and the sertão. As Jean-Claude Bernardet claimed writing about Brazilian cinema of the late 1950s and early 1960s, “fanaticism congregates more people than cangaceirismo, but they both have the same origin: unsatisfied peasants follow the beato (holy man) whose prophecies speak of a world of abundance and justice instead of the suffering on earth. It is also about disorganized rebellion: they do not have a consciousness about why they are rebelling against the state of their situation nor do they propose to change anything. The solution for this unconscious revolt is in alienation of the violence or hysteric mysticism, that always represents an alternative for the life of the semi-enslaved

⁵⁸¹ Luis Buñuel’s *Simon del desierto* (Simon of the Desert, 1965) depicts a similar type of rural religious figure and movement in Mexico, but supposedly Buñuel was influenced by Glauber Rocha’s *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* (Black God, White Devil, 1964), and Glauber Rocha even appeared in *Simon del desierto*. Werner Herzog’s *Cobra Verde* (1987) has a scene of mysticism in the Brazilian sertão that depicts an (out of place) orixá dancing through the backlands, but this seems to be more of a reference to Glauber Rocha’s *O dragão da maldade contra o santo guerreiro* (Antônio das Mortes, 1969).

peasant.”⁵⁸²

While Bernardet’s arguments describe the political ideology behind the representations in Brazilian cinema of both the cangaceiro and the fanatic, I argue that these symbols actually held different meanings, making it necessary to analyze the fanatic separately from the cangaceiro. One difference is that the cangaceiro can either be represented as “good” or “bad,” but in feature films, the representations of the messianic movements are remarkably invariable, crossing from the political films of the Cinema Novo to more commercial productions without much alteration. In most films about the Northeast, even if a messianic movement is not the major theme, it is common to have the cangaceiros or others come across a group of *romeiros*, holding a cross, dressed in rags, traversing the heat of the backlands without carrying even a jug of water, chanting or singing as they cross the screen. These films all show the movements as violent and the followers as being duped by the charismatic leader, and the directors cast a certain imagined memory of Canudos that supports the dominant narrative of Northeastern religion. With few exceptions, those who choose to follow folk cults in film are doomed to a precarious existence or death by annihilation. In this section, I discuss the representations of the fanatics of the sertão in cinema novo and commercial productions, and then I discuss the representations of Northeastern religion in a broader perspective with some of the portrayals of Afro-Brazilian and other folk religions depicted on screen.

In the opening scene of Glauber Rocha’s *Deus e o diabo*, the vaqueiro (cowhand) Manuel comes across Sebastião, played by an actor of African descent

⁵⁸² Bernardet, *Brasil em tempo*, 40.

(Lídio Silva) who is dressed in long dark robes and carries a large wooden cross.⁵⁸³

Figure 4

Glauber Rocha, *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol*, 1964



He leads a group of *romeiros* (pilgrims) who are chanting and singing, dropping to pray periodically as they cross the screen without interacting with Manuel who circles around them on horseback. The scene takes place in a dry place of the sertão, coded by the presence of a bleached cow's skull that precedes the scene with the romeiros. After Manuel and his wife, Rosa, flee from their home, they find refuge in the cult on Monte Santo, the place associated with Canudos. Rocha films the actors amongst local people, repeatedly shown screaming and praying, with weathered faces, and women dressed in black. While Rosa never accepts the cult, Manuel seeks to be one of the main followers of Sebastião, convinced by the famous millenarian statement

⁵⁸³ The character of Sebastião was supposedly based on a fusion of two beatos, Lourenço do Calderão, Ceará and Sebastião of Pedra Bonita, Pernambuco. José Carlos Avellar, *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol: A linha reta, o melaço de cana e o retrato do artista quando jovem* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1995), 87.

attributed to Antônio Conselheiro, “o sertão vai virar mar e o mar vai virar sertão” (one day the sertão will turn into the sea and the sea will turn into the sertão).

Sebastião talks of the valley flowing with rivers of milk when this day comes. His followers attack the local town, shooting those who resist, and sacking the stores.

In a separate scene, a Catholic priest contracts Antônio das Mortes, the famous “killer of cangaceiros” to kill Sebastião and the followers who the priest sees as a threat to the Church and to society. The final scene before the entire community is annihilated depicts the messianic movement as extremely violent and Sebastião as a “baby killer,” referring to alleged accounts of this type of violence in the community of Pedra Bonita. To become inducted into the movement, Manuel must carry a large rock up the mountain to the Church. He slaps Rosa in the face when she resists his interest in the movement, and struggles, falling numerous times under the weight of the rock and difficulty of the climb, all to the approval and encouragement of Sebastião who walks by his side. At the altar in the Church, Sebastião sacrifices a baby and paints a cross in blood on Manuel’s forehead, motioning to Manuel that he must kill his wife. But, in the end, Rosa kills Sebastião, to the sounds of gunfire and screams of the community being annihilated. Manuel, like the rest of the followers, is portrayed as having no agency and blindly following a violent leader who will lead everyone to their death.

The film has been interpreted as the two stages of violent and alienated Nordeste rebellion that the peasant has experienced.⁵⁸⁴ Once Antonio das Mortes

⁵⁸⁴ As Rocha claimed, “Manuel and Rosa are the prototype of a normal family who enter into the disgraceful movements because of their alienation.” “Glauber Rocha, Walter Lima Jr., David Neves, Leon Hirszman: *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol*,

has eliminated the fanatic and the cangaceiro, the peasant is finally free to act “rationally,” depicted as Manuel and Rosa run away toward the sea in the final scene.⁵⁸⁵ Rocha claimed to have drawn from literary accounts of religious fanaticism in Northeastern Brazil such as Euclides da Cunha’s *Os sertões*, and José Lins do Rêgo’s *Pedra Bonita* (1938). In a 1964 debate on *Deus e o diabo* sponsored by the Federação dos Clubes de Cinema do Brasil, a number of directors and film critics discussed how the film provided a “popular” account of messianic movements based on these literary works, being both “real” and “realistic.”⁵⁸⁶ Supposedly, Rocha created a realistic portrayal based on the popular poetry, songs and legends of the Northeast.⁵⁸⁷ But, this statement must be mediated by the fact that the directors and film critics shared a certain version of what was understood as popular interpretations of religious cults in Northeastern Brazil, from their standpoint as intellectuals and artists who never lived in or experienced that world. In other words, the idea that the film portrayed a realistic and popular version of the messianic movements of the Northeast illustrates the point that the film touched upon long standing stereotypes and preconceptions of religious fanaticism in the Northeast.⁵⁸⁸

The scenes of religious fanaticism in Ruy Guerra’s *Os fuzís* (The Guns, 1964)

1964,” in Alex Viany, *O processo de Cinema Novo* (Rio de Janeiro: Aeroplano, 1999), 83.

⁵⁸⁵ Bernardet, *Brasil em tempo*, 72-73.

⁵⁸⁶ “Glauber Rocha, Walter Lima Jr.,” *O processo de Cinema Novo*, 51-84.

⁵⁸⁷ Rocha stated, “No Nordeste os cego, nos teatros populares, nos circos, nas feiras, dizem: *vou contar uma história que é de verdade e de imaginação*, ou então, *que é de imaginação verdadeira*.” Quoted in Avellar, *Deus e o diabo*, 88.

⁵⁸⁸ Rocha claimed that the two films that influenced him the most in directing *Deus e o diabo* were the Italian neorealist films, Visconti’s *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (1962) and Rosi’s *Salvatore Giuliano* (1962). It is not surprising that both of these films depict certain versions and stereotypes of Southern Italians. “Glauber Rocha, Walter Lima Jr.,” *O processo de Cinema Novo*, 69-71.

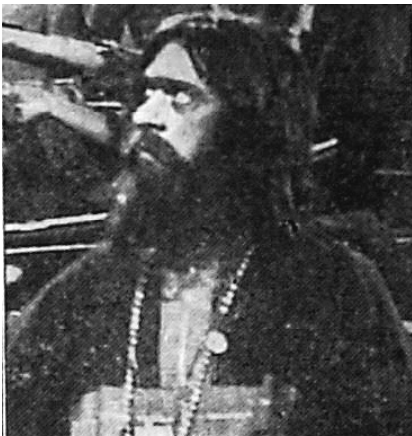
depict a beato who appears similar to images of Antonio Conselheiro of Canudos. The longhaired, gaunt figure leads a group of Nordestinos through the sertão, praying and worshipping a steer (boi). When the romeiros reach the town, they gather on the rocks. What is most impressive in this depiction is their lack of agency. The romeiros are motionless and do not interact with each other or anyone else. Guerra either cast small people or the camera angle made them appear dwarfed in comparison to the main actors who talk and interact and move around the romeiros as if they are not human, emphasizing their animal-ness and lack of agency. Toward the end of the film, the holy steer dies, and at this point the beato instructs his followers, “What are you waiting for? Eat!” The masses dive in, noisily carving up sections of the holy steer. Although this is a very “human” response to a dead steer for hungry people, the scene again dehumanizes the romeiros, portraying them as more similar to vultures than human beings.

Similarly, commercial films also contain images of Antonio Conselheiro, and relate him to sexual deviancy, violence, and a lack of agency of the followers. Fernando de Barros’s *Riacho de sangue* (Creek of Blood, 1967) cast Alberto Ruschel – the blonde gaucho hero of *O cangaceiro* (1953) – as a Nordeste cowboy who faces the violence of coronelismo, cangaceiros, and religious fanaticism. *Riacho de sangue* is a commercial Nordestern with scenes of Ruschel riding on horseback through a sertão peppered with love scenes and extreme violence, all accompanied by triumphant music. The second half of the film is about a religious community that works with Ruschel and the cangaceiros to protect the beato (holy man) and the community against a military attack. Newspaper reviews of the film emphasized how

the film focused on fanaticism, seen as a common problem in the Northeast. As Barros claimed, “A luta do nordestino pela sobrevivência, agarrando-se, inclusive, ao fanatismo será o pano de fundo do filme.”⁵⁸⁹ Lenildo Martins interpreted the role of Beato Primo, a long-haired, tall, gaunt man dressed in black robes, similar to the illustrations of Antônio Conselheiro.

Figure 5

Fernando de Barros, *Riacho de Sangue*, 1967



In one scene, Beato Primo is shown inducting a young woman into his church, asking her to strip, tying her to a wall, and whipping her while his face and body posture indicate this is a sexualized encounter, once again linking sexual perversity to the religious movement of the Northeast. Beato Primo also keeps many birds in cages, which could easily be interpreted symbolically as the followers he traps in his religious cult. The final scene is a bloody battle between the military (interpreted by the Esquadrão de Cavalaria da Polícia Militar de Pernambuco) and the townspeople, ending in the complete annihilation of the town with the exception of Ruschel and

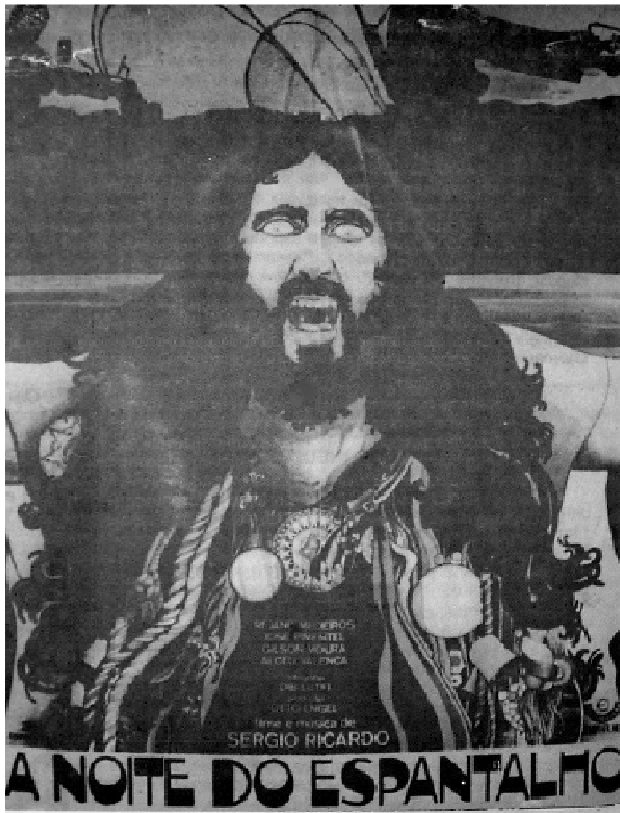
⁵⁸⁹ “Fernando de Barros filma em Pernambuco.” Folder “Fernando de Barros.” FUNARTE archive. Rio de Janeiro.

one baby. The prophecy of Beato Primo, stated throughout in the film, has come to pass: “O Senhor disse que a terra tem que ser lavado com a sangue dos inocentes.”

One of perhaps the strangest films on religious fanaticism was Sérgio Ricardo’s *A noite de espantinho* (1974). The film showed at film festivals in Cannes and in New York, and was described as a Bossa Novo *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

Figure 6

Sérgio Ricardo, *A noite de espantinho*, 1974



Ricardo had worked with Glauber Rocha on *Deus e o diabo* where he supposedly came up with the idea for *A noite*, based on literatura de cordel and the “fantastic” in the Northeast. The film was shot in Fazenda Nova, Pernambuco in 1965, a town under construction with the purpose of making a version of Jerusalem in the

Northeast (with the spectacle of the passion plays still performed to sold-out crowds every year). As Ricardo claimed in an interview, “O ciclo da seca, o misticismo e o coronelismo estão presentes no filme, causas principais da miséria do nordeste. (...) O Nordeste continua o mesmo, desde Euclides da Cunha. A tecnologia se aproxima do homem do campo, modifica alguns dos seus hábitos, mas sua cultura está inalterada. Ele tem a mesma mentalidade e sofre os mesmos problemas.”⁵⁹⁰ Ricardo commented that the townspeople understood the story better than the actors, which he claimed supported the idea that the film was “popular” and would be received better in the rural areas than in the cities. As exemplified by the posters, the beato in the film is similar to other representations, although a bit “funkier” or circus-like.

But, the symbol of Canudos or Pedra Bonita is not the only way in which films about the Northeast have focused on religious practices. Afro-Brazilian or “folk” religions also have composed a major theme in film on the Northeast, often coded as “black” or “African.” While such portrayals do not rely on the same type of representations of violence or annihilation as the messianic cults, these representations associate this type of religious belief and practice with Northeastern Brazil, constructing yet another version of the Other. Many scholars and filmmakers in the 1960s claimed that Afro-Brazilian religions were the “opiate of the people,” and did not have the power to provoke the same type of “pre-revolutionary” movement as the messianic movements.⁵⁹¹ And while that perspective is manifested

⁵⁹⁰ “Sergio Ricardo de volta com ‘A Noite do Espantalho.’” Folder 12745, “A Noite do Espantalho” FUNARTE Archive. Rio de Janeiro.

⁵⁹¹ For instance, Maria Pereira de Queiroz, “Messiahs in Brazil,” *Past and Present* 31 (July 1965): 62-86; David E. Mutchler, “Roman Catholicism in Brazil,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 1, no. 8 (August 1965): 117.

in the “revolutionary” films of the early 1960s, the commercial productions portrayed a more active role for Afro-Brazilian religions. As mentioned earlier, *o Nordeste* is broad enough to encompass multiple versions of Otherness, so long as all of them portray the region as backwards, non-modern, non-white, in sum: the Other in Brazil.

In a number of films on the sertão, both commercial and Cinema Novo, scenes of folk religious practices and ceremonies are depicted as “black” or “African.” For instance, in Nelson Pereira dos Santos’s *Vidas Secas* (Barren Lives, 1963), after the cowhand Fabiano returns from the local town, injured by the beating he received from the police, the family finds a healer. The scene portrays an older woman of African descent using branches and other “folk” cures, repeating rituals and prayers that are not a part of the Catholic religion. In Carlos Coimbra’s *A morte comanda o cangaço*, the “bad” cangaceiro is first shown on screen in the middle of an “African” or “Afro-Brazilian” ceremony with an older woman of African descent perform rituals with blood to protect the cangaceiro. The ceremonies are coded as “black” and symbolize an Otherness, linked to the poverty and non-modern sertão as well as, in the case of *A morte*, to the film’s villains.

Two films portray the type of Afro-Brazilian religious practices associated with the coastal areas of Northeastern Brazil: Glauber Rocha’s *Barravento* (The Turning Wind, 1962) and João Ramiro Mello and Vladimir Carvalho’s *Romeiros da guia* (1962).⁵⁹² These films provide a “realistic” depiction of the role of Afro-

⁵⁹² *Barravento* is a part of what has become known as the “Bahian Renaissance” as Robert Stam defines, “the cinematic rediscovery of the cultural riches of Salvador, Bahia in the early 1960s” that focused on Afro-Brazilian religious themes. The films associated with this movement include Trigueirinho Neto’s *Bahia de Todos os Santos* (Bahia of All the Saints, 1960), Anselmo Duarte’s *O pagador de promessas* (The

Brazilian religion in present-day rural coastal communities. Rocha's *Barravento* starts with an explanation of Afro-Brazilian religion in the Northeast, describing religion from a historical materialist perspective as something that allows people to suffer in misery and illiteracy, or the opiate of the masses.⁵⁹³ But the film provides a slightly more complicated version of religion, with scenes that depict spirituality as a powerful force, not necessarily condemning it.⁵⁹⁴ Rocha draws a strong connection to Africa and slavery in the film, noting that the culture and religion are historical legacies that still function to oppress poor, rural people.

In comparison, João Ramiro Mello and Vladimir Carvalho's documentary tells of the members of fishing community who embark upon a spiritual pilgrimage to the seventeenth century ruins of the fort of Cabedelo to perform an Afro-Brazilian religious ceremony at the Church of Nossa Senhora da Guia. As with *Barravento*, the film emphasizes the present-day community's connections to the past: colonialism and slavery. The film itself opens with phrases from Euclides da Cunha's *Os sertões*,

Given Word, 1962), Glauber Rocha's *Barravento* (The Turning Wind, 1962), and Roberto Pires's *A grande feira* (The Big Market, 1962). Robert Stam, *Tropical Multiculturalism: A Comparative History of Race in Brazilian Cinema and Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 205.

⁵⁹³ The opening scene scrolls the following: "The seacoast of Bahia is the home of black fishermen whose ancestors came from Africa as slaves. There they still worship the African gods and are dominated by a tragic and fatalistic mysticism. They accept misery, illiteracy, and exploitation with the passivity typical of those who await the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Iemanjá is the queen of the waters, the lady of the sea who loves, protects and punishes the fishermen. The barravento is the moment of violence, the moment when land and sea are transformed; when love, life, and the social world undergo sudden exchanges.

None of the characters presented in this film have any relationship to people living or dead, and any resemblance is pure coincidence. The facts portrayed, however, do exist." Quoted in Stam, *Tropical Multiculturalism*, 221.

⁵⁹⁴ Thank you to Paula Halperín for a discussion of this perception of *Barravento*.

emphasizing the fanaticism that defines Northeastern religions: “E as crenças singulares traduzem essa aproximação violenta de tendencias distintas...saem das missas consagradas para os agapes selvagens.” The community is described as being completely isolated from modern urban life, and the film shows the “primitive” fishermen using jangadas, although they clearly were not “isolated” since the town is located just outside of João Pessoa, the capital of Paraíba. For the representation of the Northeast to function, however, it is imperative that the people and communities shown on film appear to be isolated and disconnected from the rest of Brazil. In the religious ceremony, the camera focuses on an older woman of African descent crawling on her knees to worship while the voice-over describes the religious syncretism of the ceremony. The community dances and sings a “coco,” a type of song and dance with a strong drumbeat that is particular to each community and is associated with slavery.

One of the most nationally and internationally renown films of this era, Anselmo Duarte’s *Pagador de promessas* (The Given Word, 1962) which won the Palme d’Or at Cannes in 1962 and was the first Brazilian film nominated for an Oscar (1963), focuses on a type of folk, rural religion that conflicts directly with the Catholic Church. The story tells of Zé-do-burro (Zé-of-the-donkey) who has carried a large wooden cross across the sertão to complete a promise that he made to Saint Barbara or Iansã to ensure the health of his donkey.

Figure 7

Anselmo Duarte, *O Pagador de Promessas*, 1962



Upon his arrival, the Catholic priest refuses to allow Zé to enter the Church because he made his promise to Iansã at a candomblé ceremony (terreiro) instead of to Saint Barbara in the official Church. While waiting outside the Church, the story unfolds, turning Zé into a Christ-like figure, supported by the Afro-Brazilian population, symbolized by the presence of candomblé practitioners and capoeiristas. The media turns the story of Zé into a story of agrarian reform, and local businessmen, the priests, and politicians organize against Zé. In the end, Zé is shot in a skirmish with the police and then the population carries him on his cross into the Church.

In October of 1962, the *Diario de Pernambuco* republished a story from São Paulo about a “moço baixo” who was carrying a three-meter, 50-kilogram, wooden cross through the streets of São Paulo to complete his promise. The story, entitled “Pernambucano, o novo Pagador de Promessas,” compared the event directly to the

movie: “Antonio José dos Santos, natural de Altinho no Estado de Pernambuco, 30 anos de idade, muito saúde e fé, foi o autor de façanha, revivendo, nas mais movimentadas ruas de São Paulo, o episódio do ‘Pagador de Promessas.’”⁵⁹⁵ Except that the story of Antonio José dos Santos’s promise is slightly different: Instead of making a promise for the health of his burro, Santos carries the cross so that Ademar de Barros will win the elections. As he is quoted,

“Caminhei hora e meia; as forças ameaçavam faltar-me, porém, a ajuda da Padroeira e a lembrança de Ademar eleito mantiveram-me de pé, e cumpri minha promessa,” – disse Antônio José à saída da Catedral, pálido de dor, suando de cansaço. Veio de sua terra natal para fazer a promessa. Nunca desejou tanto cumprí-la. A admiração, o respeito, o amor quase paternal que o governador eleito lhe inspira, fizeram com que abandonasse temporariamente seu lar e peregrinasse pela Capital paulista.

Antônio José dos Santos é um pernambucano simples, de fala arrastada. A emoção perturba-lhe a voz quando diz, “Não quero propaganda, cumpro apenas o meu dever de gratidão para com o homem que me deu de comer quando pequeno.”

Santos explained that when he was starving as a child, Barros sent planes from São Paulo to the Northeast with food and water, which the article claimed was the reason why he was now carrying a cross for Ademar de Barros. The Paulista mayor and presidential candidate of the right (PSP, Partido Social Progressista) lost the election to Jânio Quadros, but the article is interesting in that it describes this man’s political beliefs with direct reference to the Nordeste in the well-known film. It would seem that it was newsworthy because it was seen as a way to appeal to the Northeastern population to obtain political support for Barros. But it is remarkable in its use of blatant stereotypes of the Nordeste to describe Antonio José dos Santos, and how such descriptions confirmed the veracity of stereotypes in the film, a film

⁵⁹⁵ “Pernambucano, o novo Pagador de Promessas,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 18 October 1962, 1.

that was widely criticized by the Cinemanovistas for being “commercial” and an exotic version of the Northeast because of a cast of well-known actors and the relatively high production costs. As film critics Wills Leal and Paulo Emilio Salles Gomes observed, the film is a perfect example of the Sulista version of the Northeast created by the media. But, the newspaper story also shows the power that cinematic representations possessed in the South in defining the Northeast.

A good example to summarize the argument of this section – representations of Northeastern religion create a certain version of the region and its people as the Other through the historical symbols of messianism and Afro-Brazilian culture – is found in Geraldo Sarno’s documentary *Viramundo* (1965). Sarno creates a division between the modern, industrial São Paulo and Paulistas and the backwards, rural Nordeste emigrants who arrive in São Paulo searching for a way to survive. The interview style and editing cuts create an extremely uncomfortable documentary, in which Sarno appears to be forcing his argument: Nordestinos cannot fit into the modern city and the modern city no longer has room for the Nordeste emigrant.

The documentary focuses on labor relations and cultural differences in which religion plays a major role. After a scene with an industrialist who makes a bigoted remark about Nordestinos and then declares that Nordestinos are the first to be laid-off in a period of recession, Sarno films the misery of the Nordeste in the city. Sarno shows masses of unemployed workers and leads the audience to believe that only the solution to their misery of these workers is found religion. The film has a scene with an evangelical preacher discussing the need for “caridade,” with shots of soup kitchens and food provided from the United States. Sarno portrays the poor

masses partaking in Umbanda and Evangelical ceremonies with the idea that religion is the only way to heal the “sick” masses through “miracles.” These scenes are dizzying, and give the impression of fanaticism, highlighted by shots of religious leaders illustrating the miracles cures that have healed the sick. The next scene shows Nordestinos returning to the Northeast on the train. The documentary’s depiction of alternative religious practices as a part of Nordeste culture that stand in conflict with the modernity of São Paulo restate a familiar narrative of the non-modern, Nordeste fanatic who has no place in modern Brazil.

Intellectual Perceptions of Fanaticism in the 1950s and 1960s

Interestingly enough, many of the intellectuals who wrote about Northeastern Brazil and its culture repeated many of the same ideas as those found in Brazilian cinema. One understanding of the phenomenon of fanaticism in Northeastern Brazil was biological or psychological. Waldemar Valente wrote an essay on Sebastianism in 1963 for the Instituto Joaquim Nabuco de Pesquisas Sociais that was then commented on in an editorial in the *Diario de Pernambuco*. Valente argued that mystical-religious movements come from ecological factors (drought and floods, as described in Exodus), cultural factors, and the dominant presence of “bio-psychological” factors that create a type of human who is psychologically more inclined toward mysticism.⁵⁹⁶ This “leptossômico” or “psicología esquisotímica” provided the conditions for “psicose, esquisofrenia, paranoia,” and when cultivated as a mass

⁵⁹⁶ “Misticismo popular,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 3 July 1963, 4.

movement, to the violence of messianic movements or banditry.⁵⁹⁷ Valente claimed that Sebastianism came from the Portuguese and the religious practices and beliefs of the colonial experience. According to Valente, racial mixing and the type of non-sedentary and underdeveloped lifestyle of the sertão exacerbated such tendencies.

Another type of study on “fanatics” of the Northeast examined the military actions. Dante de Mello’s *A verdade sobre ‘Os sertões’ (Análise reivindicatória da campanha de Canudos)* (1958) provoked a debate with historian Luís Viana Filho, resulting in yet another publication *Recolocando a verdade* in 1961.⁵⁹⁸ Mello’s objective was to reject the tragic tale of Canudos, challenging da Cunha’s idea that the “rebels” of Canudos were famished and under prepared for the “cruel” attack by the “well-fed and robust” Brazilian military.⁵⁹⁹ Mello claimed that da Cunha’s chronicle presented a dramatic account that was not based on facts and meant to cause a feeling of sympathy for the oppressed. But, by looking at other sources, Mello argued that the jagunços of Canudos were much more dangerous and well-prepared and should not be seen as “oppressed people.” He claimed it was evident that the

⁵⁹⁷ Waldemar Valente, *Misticismo e região (Aspectos do Sebastianismo Nordestino)* (Recife: Instituto Joaquim Nabuco de Pesquisas Sociais, 1963), 15-19.

⁵⁹⁸ Gilberto Freyre reviewed Dante de Mello’s *A verdade sobre ‘Os sertões’* in the *Diario de Pernambuco* in 1959, a writer for the Biblioteca do Exército who focused on the military action of the campaign. Gilberto Freyre, “Canudos e o estadualismo republicano” *Diario de Pernambuco* 29 March 1959, 4.

⁵⁹⁹ The passage from *Os sertões* he cites and argues against: “Porque havia, de feito, algo de dolorosamente insolente no afôgo, na ânsia despoderada com que aqueles bravos militares – robustos, bem fardados, bem nutridos, bem armados, bem dispostos – procuravam morcegar a organização desfilbrada de adversaries que desviviam há três meses, famintos, baleados, queimados, dessangrados gota a gota, e as forças perdidas...sucumbindo dia a dia num esgotamento absolutas. Dariam a última punctura de baioneta no peito do agonizante...” Dante de Mello, *A verdade sobre ‘Os sertões’ (Análise reivindicatória da campanha de Canudos)* (Rio de Janeiro: Biblioteca do Exército – Editora, 1958), 11.

Canudos forces numbered over 5,000 men who were well armed and robust. The conditions of warfare supposedly always favored the jagunços of Canudos with a style of guerrilla warfare and their innovative weapons that were better for the sertão than the military's weapons.⁶⁰⁰ He claimed that the local people served as spies for the Canudos forces, operating under the "camouflage" of Brazilian nationality.⁶⁰¹ Throughout the book, he insisted that the "racial type" of the Canudos "fanatics" came from their violent history of the quilombo of Palmares, the Sebastianists of Pedra Bonita and the indigenous tribes. Mello referred to the followers of Canudos as "voracious and savage animals" whose physical features show their hereditary "format of the most nonconformist blacks and the most ferocious Indians."⁶⁰² His point was to validate the military actions and to reconstruct their historic role as heroes who fought against the most violent savages who threatened the Brazil nation. It is important to note that his books were published by the Biblioteca do Exército, precisely at the time when rural social activism was increasing throughout the Northeast.

However, the most common argument expressed in the 1950s and 1960s looked at a combination of historical and cultural influences that led people to participate in messianic movements in times of social or political crisis.⁶⁰³ For

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid., 53-54.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., 79-90.

⁶⁰² Ibid., 140-142. He describes the women as having "narizes atorados, curtos, de buracos à mostra como bocas de forno. Olhos inexpressivos, enfumaçados e congestos; ali, olhos vermelhos ou selvagens, bocas glotonas, dentes pavorosos. Outras vezes, queixos imensos ou desmarcado espaço naso-labial. E a expressão fisionomica...coroando o desastre!"

⁶⁰³ José Maria de Oliveira Silva describes this period in the historiography of messianism as a "transformation of the social reality." José Maria de Oliveira Silva,

instance, Roger Bastide's *Brasil – Terra dos contrastes* (1957), was reviewed and praised in the *Diário de Pernambuco* in 1959 for the “connection he drew between drought/hunger and religious fanaticism.”⁶⁰⁴ Bastide emphasized the historical legacies of African slavery and Portuguese colonialism as reasons for the types of religious practices that exist in Northeastern Brazil. In the chapter on “African Presence,” Bastide discussed the syncretism of the “cane civilization,” arguing that it is impossible to separate the mysticism of Catholicism from the mysticism of the orixás in the coastal region of the Northeast. In his detailed descriptions of candomblé ceremonies, Bastide emphasized what he calls their “African-ness,” and describes animal sacrifices, drums pounding, and the “ecstasy” of the rituals.⁶⁰⁵

In the chapter entitled “The Other Northeast,” Bastide examined the “civilização de couro” or the sertanejo culture, that was supposedly more Indian than African with a religion that is “tão trágica, tão machucada de espinho, tão torturada de sol quanto a paisagem; religião da cólera divina, num solo em que a sêca ecena imagens do Juízo Final, e em que os rubicundos anjos barrocos, negros ou brancos, cedem lugar aos anjos do extermínio. O penitente vergastado pelas disciplinas, lava com sangue os pecados do mundo e o profeta substitui aqui o padre.”⁶⁰⁶ Bastide argued that fanaticism appears in times of drought, which allows him to compare

“Rever Canudos: Historiicidade e Religiosidade Popular (1940-1995),” (PhD diss., Universidade de São Paulo, 1996), 122-123.

⁶⁰⁴ Octávio Domingues, “Brasil, terra dos contrastes,” *Diário de Pernambuco* 23 January 1959, 4. In the review, Domingues praises a foreigner for understanding “our country” so well, emphasizing the idea that religious fanaticism (and cangaceirismo) comes from drought and hunger.

⁶⁰⁵ Roger Bastide, *Brasil, Terra dos contrastes*. 5th Edition. (São Paulo: Difusão Européia do Livro, 1973), 75-85.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 87-88.

Northeastern Brazil to Europe in the Middle Ages or India. He described fanaticism as evolving in acts: The first act was syncretism of Portuguese and Indian religions in the sertão, smoking “erva santa.” The second was Pedra Bonita (1836-38) in which “erva santa” allows for ecstatic rituals and sexual deviation, including mestiço/índio João Antonio dos Santos’s requirement that all new brides have sexual relations with him before their husbands.⁶⁰⁷ The third act was Canudos, described as a millianarian movement that predicted the end of the world. The Fourth Act was Juazeiro and Padre Cícero, described as “mais sentimental e menos trágico: enquadra-o em normas mais brasileiras e menos locais, a paróquia católica e o clã político.”⁶⁰⁸ The final act is entitled “A terra da promessa.” Bastide argued that Juazeiro shows the first “suavização da selvageria primitiva.”⁶⁰⁹ The messianic dream had turned into “dreams of a region where rain falls, where there is work for all, where there is radio and cinema, and wages are raised.”⁶¹⁰ Using statistics on emigration to the cities and to the south, Bastide argued that while the dislocation is “dangerous,” it also gave hope of smoothing out the contrasts, “giving Brazilians the consciousness of the harmonious unity of their country.”⁶¹¹

Rui Facó argued in *Cangaceiros e fanáticos* that messianic movements emerged in the Northeast as a way for the poor to fight against their misery and exploitation. He claimed that the participants were not criminals or backwards, as described by the dominant narratives, but were products of national

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., 98-99.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., 103.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., 105.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹¹ Ibid., 106.

underdevelopment. As he wrote, “Em todos os casos aqui focalizados – Canudos, Contestado, Caldeirão – parece ser uma tendência natural das massas rurais espoliadas, em determinadas condições, criar uma religião própria, que lhes sirva de instrumento em sua luta pela libertação social, como o cristianismo foi, em seus primórdios, religião de escravos e proletários da época.”⁶¹² Facó interviewed ex-participants in Canudos and Juazeiro, and examined how the media of the era depicted the movements. In his description of Canudos, Facó tied Canudos to the rural social movements of the 1950s and 1960s: “Canudos foi assim um dos momentos culminantes da luta de libertação dos pobres do campo. Sua resistência indomável mostra o formidável potencial revolucionário existente no âmago das populaces sertanejas e a enorme importância do movimento camponês no Brasil, cuja população rural constitui, ainda hoje, a principal parcela das massas laboriosas do País. A epopéia de Canudos ficará em nossa história como um patrimônio das massas do campo e uma glória do movimento revolucionário pela sua libertação.”⁶¹³

Facó’s interpretation of Padre Cícero was that he was no different from any other latifundiário in the region. Keeping the “fanatics” in Juazeiro through the idea of miracles was his way of preserving cheap labor in the region. “O Cariri, com os ‘milagres’ do Padre Cícero e a esperteza de Floro Bartolomeu, funcionava como válvula de contenção da sangria enorme que desfalcava permanentemente as reservas humanas do Nordeste. O grande perigo estava em perder essas reservas.”⁶¹⁴ It was Padre Cícero’s way to maintain the “velha ordem” in the Northeast: the alliance

⁶¹² Rui Facó, *Cangaceiros e fanáticos; gênese e lutas* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Civilização Brasileira, 1963), 42.

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 163.

between the bourgeoisie and the latifundio. But, the movement of Caldeirão and the Beato Lourenço with the Holy Cow (1930s) in the area of Cariri changed the rural person's consciousness. Supposedly in Caldeirão, the settlers, "cavaram reservatórios de água, levantaram barragens, canalizaram riachos, irrigaram o solo que parecia inaproveitável." Crops grew and they started a factory to produce rapadura, and through this, "there was justice, and the organization and value of work."⁶¹⁵ In 1938, the army and Pernambucan police, acting on a federal mandate, moved in and repressed the "fanatics."⁶¹⁶ But, the experience of Caldeirão led to the "break of the old ties with semi-feudal dependency," forcing the labor relations to change in Cariri.⁶¹⁷

In Josué de Castro's *Sete palmos de terra e um caixão: Ensaio sobre o Nordeste uma area explosiva* (1965), he explained that "suffering" was the great cultural inheritance of the Northeast in a chapter entitled, "Six hundred thousand square miles of suffering."⁶¹⁸ In some ways, Castro combined Bastide's "land of contrasts" with Facó's socio-economic analysis.⁶¹⁹ Castro provided an analysis of the historic and present agricultural practices and soil conditions in the Northeast as well as looking at issues of nutrition. He argued that these conditions created the physical type of the Nordestino. In times of drought, the Nordestino suffered from the lack of

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., 199.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid., 205.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid., 211.

⁶¹⁸ Josué de Castro, *Sete palmos de terra e um caixão: Ensaio sobre o Nordeste uma area explosiva* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1965), 39.

⁶¹⁹ As he states, "O Nordeste é este contraste vivo estampada nas duas paisagens (...) Nestes dois quadros naturais tão diferentes se formaram também duas sociedades como em sua história. E a história economico-social dessas duas comunidades contíguas representa a patrimonio histórico de toda a região do Nordeste." Ibid.

basic nutrients, eventually turning into a human who is “more dead than alive.”⁶²⁰

The drought crisis, according to Castro, resulted in the emergence of “as psicopatias graves, verdadeiras psicoses reacionais ou de situação. Assim se geram os bandidos e os santos – sinners and saints – das eras de calamidade.”⁶²¹ But, the climate conditions were what exacerbated the suffering of the Nordeste leading to political agitation and the explosiveness. As Castro asserted, the underlying historic and economic structures of the Northeast such as coronelismo and monocultural agricultural production and regional underdevelopment were the real causes that led to explosive reactions such as cangaceiros or fanáticos.

In a contribution to an edited volume on comparative studies of millenarian movements, René Ribeiro wrote a chapter on Brazilian messianic movements in which he drew attention to a psychological study that had been done on followers of the Panelas incident.⁶²² According to Ribeiro, the study “demolished” the notion that the followers were psychotic or had “abnormal personalities.” Instead, the study found that it was “the naivete of their beliefs and world-views as well as the importance of the social milieu in conditioning them to accept the message of their leader.”⁶²³ Interestingly enough, Ribeiro used a direct example from the political situation of Recife in 1960 to punctuate his arguments about the rise in messianic movements due to participants’ dissatisfaction with the political, social, or economic system and their social and cultural isolation. Ribeiro had been handed a folheto in

⁶²⁰ Ibid., 85.

⁶²¹ Ibid., 99.

⁶²² René Ribeiro, “Brazilian Messianic Movements,” in *Millenial Dreams in Action: Essays in Comparative Study*, ed. Sylvia L. Thrupp (The Hague: Moulton & Co., 1962), 55-69.

⁶²³ Ibid., 68.

1960 by a taxi driver entitled, “Operations of the Celestial Government founded in Brazil on January 1, 1960.” It was a message from someone named Cícero José Farias, the leader of the “Christian Jesuit Legion,” who had received a message through telepathy to start the movement in Juazeiro do Norte, Ceará and Arcoverde, Pernambuco. Ribeiro quoted the following from this pamphlet:

As we move toward the end of the 20th century the sayings of the Scriptures about the new Earth and the new Heaven and the coming of the Son of Man in the Majesty of his Celestial Father will be fulfilled...The year of 1960 will be the milestone marking the second advent of Jesus...Other civilizations have been born, therefore how would the civilization of the New Jerusalem, the wife of the Paschal Lamb, fail to dawn? ...the Son of Man shall be hailed as the King of Brazil and of the government of the World for centuries of centuries, and the New Earthly Jerusalem shall take its sons to the Heavenly Jerusalem. Then Heaven shall be joined with Earth under one government and one Judge, who shall be God among men.

Ribeiro also declared that there were 24 rules of “pure moral conduct” listed in the folheto for those who wanted to join the movement. Although it is impossible to understand the details surrounding such a publication since this movement never took off, what Ribeiro inferred was that the “instability” and dissatisfaction of rural people in the early 1960s were generating new messianic movements. The underlying suggestion is that the poor were in a state of susceptibility for messianic leaders to fill their heads with promises of change. While Ribeiro did not mention the Ligas Camponesas specifically, the argument acquired a political significance when taken in context of the criticisms made of Francisco Julião and the Ligas to be described in the next section.

Religious Fanaticism and Agrarian Reform

One of the most powerful ways used to critique Francisco Julião and the *Ligas*

Camponesas was to compare the leader and the movement to Antonio Conselheiro and Canudos or at least to refer to the messianic and fanatic tendencies of the leaders and the movement. For instance, in a letter providing a requested description of the Ligas from the Delegado de Polícia of Vitória de Santo Antão providing a requested description of the Ligas to the Secretária da Segurança Pública in Recife, the local delegado described the Sociedade Agrícola dos Plantadores de Pernambuco as having “300 associados, dos quais pelo menos 50% são verdadeiros fanáticos.”⁶²⁴ Criticisms of Julião and the Ligas drew on popular cultural representations of messianic movements in Northeastern Brazil that accentuated fanaticism and charisma, lack of agency of the participants, violence, preordained repression, and “foreign agitation.” In this section, I describe how the mainstream media and large landowners used ideas relating to historic messianic movements to demonize Julião, the Ligas, and Leftist politicians. Then, I show how the Ligas and the PCB attempted to dispel this criticism by changing the mainstream interpretation of Canudos and Padre Cícero.

Commentary in the *Diario de Pernambuco* in 1959 raised the notion that the Ligas were implanting a “regime of terror.”⁶²⁵ Newspaper reports emphasized the idea that the peasants “receive their orders from Julião.” For instance, in a testimonio by the owner of the Engenho Pindobal in 1961, José Aymar, he claimed that the problem was that communists and agitators were invading the engenho and causing

⁶²⁴ Secretária da Segurança Pública – Pernambuco. Prontuário Funcionario, s/numero, no.29.796 (no. 132-134), “Ligas Camponesas,” January 1956. Letter from the Delegado de Polícia, Vitória de Santo Antão to the Secretária da Segurança Pública. DOPS-PE. Recife.

⁶²⁵ “Agita-se a ‘Liga Camponesa’ em Vitória de Santo Antão,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 13 May 1959, 5.

unrest, not the peasants themselves.⁶²⁶ According to Aymar, the “ignorance of the rural man” allowed the communists to manipulate the peasants for their own political project without concern for the real interests of the peasantry. Aymar described the peasants as “honest rural men” who were being sacrificed by a “leader who does not want a solution to the national agrarian problem.”⁶²⁷ Many of the testimonies by large landowners found in the DOPS-PE files emphasized the issue of foreign agitators coming to their properties to stir up trouble with the “ignorant” rural workers, putting the blame for protest and land invasions almost entirely on the leaders.⁶²⁸ For instance, in a Relatório for the Secretária de Segurança Pública from the Delgado da Polícia in Agua Preta and Palmares, Pernambuco, in June of 1961, the Ligas were described as having around 150 members in the area, who “devido à falta de instrução e à desassistência social em que vivem, são facilmente atraídos pelo

⁶²⁶ “Senhor de Engenho defende-se e acusa ‘Ligas Camponesas,’ *Diario de Pernambuco* 26 January 1961.

⁶²⁷ Ibid.

⁶²⁸ For instance, in handwritten notes in the Paudalho file at DOPS-PE, someone associated with the Secretária da Segurança Pública explained: “O camponês é ignorante, é miserável, mas é bom.” The notes repeatedly refer to how Julião and other leaders are taking advantage of the camponês to cause agitation and unrest in the countryside. Secretária da Segurança Pública – Pernambuco. Prontuário Funcionário: Ligas Camponesas Engenho Malemba, 1959-1960, no. 29343 (Paudalho, no. 28), Notes on stationary of the Secretária da Segurança Pública, no. 6, p.5. DOPS-PE. Recife.

Another letter from the owner of the Engenho Cananduba in Jaboatão claimed that Julião was using these “seres analfabetos, e ignorantes, ludibriando-os, na sua bôa fê e ignorancia, afim de fomentar desordens, anarquias e subverter o nosso regime.” Secretária da Segurança Pública – Pernambuco. Prontuário Funcionário: Ligas Camponesas Engenho Malemba, 1959-1960 no. 29343 (Paudalho, no. 28, 1959-1960), Letter from Odette Periera Carneiro, “Residencia efectiva “Grania Pedacinho de Céu, Sucupira” to the Secretária de Segurança Publica do Estado de Pernambuco, 2 June 1960, no. 38. DOPS-PE. Recife.

comunismo, fanatizando-se de tal modo que atemorizam os proprietários.”⁶²⁹ Another relatório on the Ligas Camponesas from the Delegacia Auxiliar described the need to support the Companhia de Revenda e Colonização because

“na maioria de criaturas que não têm nenhuma formação moral ou religiosa, são na sua totalidade homens completamente analfabetos. É um elemento à mão do explorador dessa situação, como Francisco Julião, e outros que aproveitam a ignorância e inexperiência do infeliz camponês, pregando falsas promessas e doutrinando muitas vezes o espírito de revolta contra esse estado de desespero.”⁶³⁰

This narrative repeats the common assumption of the political incapacity attributed to the rural population while dismissing the reasons why rural men and women were organizing.

Similar descriptions of Julião’s alleged mysticism often formed part of the criticisms of the Ligas. The Secretário Geral of the Ação Socialista, Rodrigo Duque Estrada, claimed on a 1960 broadcast of the TV program “Face a Face” with journalist Fernando Luiz Cascudo that Julião was a “communist” who was training the peasants to be extremists. Duque Estrada was quoted in the *Diário de Pernambuco* as saying that Julião was “charismatic” portraying himself as a sufferer, both physically and morally, and warned that “com seu misticismo, está com muito entreguismo para o lado dos comunistas.”⁶³¹ Numerous political opponents on both ends of the political spectrum commented on Julião’s “exceptional” ability to

⁶²⁹ Secretária da Segurança Pública – Pernambuco. Prontuário Funcionário: Ligas Camponesas s/numero, January 1956, (no. 29.796). Relatório by 2nd Tenente Severinio Raimondo Oliveira to the Secretária de Segurança Pública, Recife, 15 June 1961, no. 118-119. DOPS-PE. Recife.

⁶³⁰ Secretária da Segurança Pública – Pernambuco. Prontuário Funcionário: Ligas Camponesas s/numero, January 1956, (no. 29.796). “Relatório das Ligas Camponesas” Delegacia Auxiliar, No. 179-180. DOPS-PE. Recife.

⁶³¹ “Duque Estrada acusou Julião de iludir os camponeses e trair o socialismo,” *Diário de Pernambuco* 24 September 1960, 5.

communicate with the rural population, often portraying it as mystical. The U.S. media also portrayed Julião as a type of “fanatic.” He was described as having “an unruly mass of hair and an intense, rather wistful air that evidently appeals to crowds”⁶³² and as being a “self-styled Marxist messiah.”⁶³³

In a consular report produced on the Ligas Camponesas in September 1960, Vice Consul Edward Walters visited the Engenho Galiléia with a group of United Nations FAO technicians to gather information about the Ligas for the U.S. State Department. Walters described Julião as a Communist, a Fidelista and a Maoist, and reported: “A clever and cocky person, born and educated in Pernambuco, Julião has assiduously maintained his reputation as a man of the soil and a man of humble origins. (...) Many of Julião’s adversaries describe him as a demagogic, uncouth person, extremely ambitious and extremely dangerous. Many of these same people consider him to be unusually honest for a Brazilian radical leader. They respect his ability as an inspiring leader of the illiterate and underprivileged rural masses”⁶³⁴ Julião was supposedly “spreading the gospel of agrarian reform” throughout the Northeast.⁶³⁵ Walters described the peasants as following Julião because of their ignorance and lack of agency. The Ligas were “taking advantage of the ignorance

⁶³² “Leftist in Brazil Warns of Revolt: Peasants’ Chief Says Land Redistribution is Vital,” *New York Times* 18 November 1961, 9.

⁶³³ “Brazil: The Hungry Land,” *Newsweek* 79 (18 May 1962): 31-32.

⁶³⁴ Brazil. U.S. Embassy. Classified General Records, 1941-1963. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State. Foreign Service Dispatch From AmConsul Recife to Dept of State Confidential: Subject: The Ligas Camponesas of Pernambuco, 7 Sept 1960. RG 84, Box 128, Folder 500 Northeast 1961. National Archives.

⁶³⁵ Ibid.

and misery of the rural worker to foment rebellious movements.”⁶³⁶ In meeting with the Galileus, Walters stated: “when allowed to speak, they [Galileus] responded in tones that did not reflect great enthusiasm for their present or future situation. They responded, this vanguard of the rural revolution, with shrugs and smiles as the State officials described their misguided past and their glorious future. It was obvious that whatever recent doubt may have been planted in their minds regarding the man and his schemes, Julião is still a demigod.”⁶³⁷

Julião claimed that he used the Bible as one of the three main tools for organizing the rural population in the Northeast. In speeches and in the Ligas Camponeses newspaper, the Biblical passages were quoted to support arguments in favor of agrarian reform. In addition to this, one of the Ligas Camponesas leaders was a Catholic priest, Father Alípio de Freitas. But, the Ligas Camponesas were not a “Catholic” movement. Many important leaders also were Protestant, such as the assassinated leader of the Sapé Ligas in Paraíba, João Pedro Teixeira. Furthermore, Julião also tried to appropriate messianic movements such as Canudos and Padre Cícero’s Juazeiro as precursors to the Ligas Camponesas and the fight for agrarian reform in the Northeast. As Regina Reyes Novaes argued in her study on the construction of a religious identity in the struggle for land, Julião did not “dispose” of the old religious symbols but imbued them with new meanings.⁶³⁸

In addition to the Bible, the Ligas and the PCB also saw the messianic

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

⁶³⁷ Ibid.

⁶³⁸ Regina Reyes Novaes, *De Corpo e Alma: Catolicismo, classes sociais e conflitos no campo* (Rio de Janeiro: Graphia, 1997), 169. But, it is also relevant to note that at least in the sources that survived from the era, the Ligas engaged only with Catholic and Protestant religion.

movement of Canudos as a precursor to the rural struggles in the 1960s because Canudos and Euclides da Cunha turned regional problems into national issues. The newspapers *LIGA* and *Novos Rumos* published a few articles on Canudos and Euclides da Cunha. In one article, Rui Facó explained how Euclides da Cunha's *Os sertões* told a story of nationalism. Facó used certain quotes to argue that Euclides da Cunha saw the heart of the nation as coming from the interior: "o homem que ele considerava 'o cerne vigoroso da nossa nacionalidade' possuía todos os atributos capazes de arrancar o País do 'presente abominável em que vivemos' e projetá-lo entre as grandes nações do futuro."⁶³⁹ *Os sertões* was described as being the first attempt to describe the differences between the urban south and the rural Northeast, turning the bloody war into a "national problem" instead of a regional problem, that "could not be resolved by bullets or dynamite: it was rural Brazil that had awakened and would no longer allow the continuance of being indefinitely ignored." Reports in 1959 also announced that Euclides da Cunha's *Os sertões* had been translated and celebrated in the Soviet Union and in China.⁶⁴⁰ The Brazilian Communist Party referred to Euclides da Cunha as a "heroic" writer. In another article in *Novos Rumos*, Romeiro Pinheiro argued that the important aspect of *Os sertões* was that it showed the solidarity of the poor, nomadic people of the Northeast and the power that they had when they formed a community of resistance. Euclides da Cunha's account was considered of great national importance because da Cunha portrayed the brutality of the Brazilian Armed Forces in graphic detail. Da Cunha's portrayal of the violence

⁶³⁹ Rui Facó, "A permanência de Euclides da Cunha," *Novos Rumos* 1959.

⁶⁴⁰ "O jubileu de Euclides da Cunha em Moscou," *Novos Rumos* 1959; "Euclides em Pequim," *Novos Rumos* 1959.

used against sertanejos and the prisoners of Canudos created a story of a crime so horrific that it would supposedly never be repeated because it had entered the national consciousness.⁶⁴¹

Another article in *LIGA* described how the War of Canudos was actually a guerrilla war. The article interpreted the story of Canudos as Antonio Conselheiro and his followers being expelled from all the lands because they had a different way of thinking than the government and the priests, so the government and the priests labeled O Conselheiro an “anti-Christ.”⁶⁴² Although the Brazilian military had better technology and weapons, the camponeses were able to win battles because of the landscape, and Antonio Conselheiro’s use of “Guerrilla Warfare.” The use of the term “guerrilla warfare” in the context of the 1960s clearly referred to Che Guevara’s manual, but the *Ligas* reframed the concept, identifying it with historic peasant struggles in Northeastern Brazil. The PCB claimed that Antonio Conselheiro had motivated the rural masses with promises of a better life, which struck the latifundiarios with fear. The present-day struggle for agrarian reform, “a repetition of the heroism of Canudos” supposedly was not motivated by religious fanaticism but rather by the desire for freedom. “Under the flag of agrarian reform and new conditions, the peasants will end the exploitation of man by man.”⁶⁴³

Besides the narrative of Canudos, Julião also appropriated Biblical passages to argue that the struggle of Jesus Christ was the struggle of class warfare, and also

⁶⁴¹ Romero Pinheiro, “Euclides da Cunha Escritor Revolucionário,” *Novos Rumos* 5-11 August 1960, 5.

⁶⁴² “Guerra de guerrilhas no Nordeste uma opinião de Euclides da Cunha,” *LIGA* 1 May 1963, 4.

⁶⁴³ Annibal Bonavides, “Canudos e Contestado,” *Novos Rumos* 16-22 February 1962, 3.

referred to recent papal encyclicals to justify the struggle for land in Northeastern Brazil. In many speeches, Julião supposedly declared, “The Church preaches resignation. But Christ was a rebel.”⁶⁴⁴ An example of how Julião and the Ligas appropriated the Bible is found in an article, “Cristo lutou pelos humildes e foi crucificado pelos ricos,” in *LIGA*. The article explains that Christ came to Earth to fight for the humble against the oppression by the rich. Jesus knew that the laws of the land were the laws of the rich. The article supports this argument by quoting from the Gospel of Matthew. As it concludes:

“Jesus foi crucificado pelo imperialismo romano, acusado de subverter a ordem e de blasfemar. (...) Mas seu sangue semeou novos frutos e hoje, grande parte da humanidade é cristã. Pena que os imperialistas de ontem, os ianques romanos de hoje, os fariseus, vendilhões do templo, os latifundiários que crucificaram Jesus e os cardeais de luxo se arvorem de proprietários da palavra de Cristo, muitos igual ao mencebo de que falamos no início deste texto.”⁶⁴⁵

When Pope John XXIII died, the Ligas newspaper declared him the Pope of Peace, noting the Pope’s stance in favor of agrarian reform and against colonialism and imperialism.⁶⁴⁶

One of the most radical and prominent leaders of the Ligas Camponesas was a Catholic priest, Father Alípio de Freitas, who was born in Portugal and moved to Brazil because of the Salazar dictatorship, serving as a priest and professor at the University of Maranhão in 1958.⁶⁴⁷ Father Alípio supposedly attended the World

⁶⁴⁴ David E. Mutchler, “Roman Catholicism in Brazil,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 1, no. 8 (August 1965): 116.

⁶⁴⁵ “Cristo lutou pelos humildes e foi crucificado pelos ricos,” *LIGA* 10 April 1963, 5.

⁶⁴⁶ “Morreu João XXIII, o Papa-camponês,” *LIGA* 5 June 1963, 1.

⁶⁴⁷ He taught Philosophy and Ancient and Medieval History and contributed to local newspapers in Maranhão. “Padre Alípio à imprensa: ‘Estou com os pobres hoje é sempre,’” *LIGA* 12 June 1963, 1. Alípio de Freitas went into exile in Mexico in 1964 after the coup and returned to Brazil in 1966 to join the revolutionary guerrilla

Conference for Disarmament and Peace in Moscow, and as a result of his “revolutionary” activities, he received punishment in the form of a suspension from the Archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro.⁶⁴⁸ Alípio contributed on a regular basis to the Ligas newspaper, and the saga of his arrests and imprisonments were frequently major headlines in the newspaper. But, apart from his political activity – unlike Archbishop Dom Helder Camara – Alípio published little independently, which makes it impossible to separate his story from the story of the Ligas, at least in the early 1960s.⁶⁴⁹

Padre Alípio de Freitas claimed to have always been on the side of the humble and the oppressed, declaring that his role as a priest was to struggle for their freedom and rights. The Ligas newspaper claimed that Padre Alípio knew, felt, and shared the “Nordestino Soul” defined as “indomita e libertária” because of his ability to share the pain and suffering of his “irmãos camponeses.”⁶⁵⁰ In speeches, Alípio spoke in favor of agrarian reform, revolution and against the latifúndia. For instance, in a speech at the Dock Workers Union, Alípio claimed

“Cristo não morreu para que existisse tanta miséria pois seu sacrifício

movement. He was arrested in 1970, tortured, and held in prison until 1979, then returning to Portugal. This part of the story will be addressed later in the dissertation.

⁶⁴⁸ Manoel Cardozo, “The Brazilian Church and the New Left,” *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 6, no. 3 (July 1964): 318. In a letter to the Archbishop of Rio de Janeiro, 16 June 1962, Alípio stated, “I am deprived of the use of holy orders and forbidden any future exercise of the priesthood in the Archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro.” Cited in. Mutchler, “Roman Catholicism in Brazil,” 112.

⁶⁴⁹ One of the main publications was printed in the Ligas newspaper, *Resistir é preciso*, later published as *Resistir é preciso: memória do tempo da morte civil do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Record, 1981). According to Regina Reyes Novais, *Resistir é preciso* “created a collective identity constituted by continuities and modifications in the political universe and religious universe,” Novaes, *De Corpo e Alma*, 84.

⁶⁵⁰ “Mensagem dos maçons ao Padre Alípio,” *LIGA* 19 June 1963, 2.

não teria passado de tapeação. Se Deus desejasse essa miséria, seria pior do que qualquer latifundiário e cúmplice pelo genocídio que aqui se pratica, quando um e meio milhão de brasileiros morrem de fome anualmente.”⁶⁵¹

He criticized the use of religion by the large landowners, claiming that “os latifundiários valem-se, entretanto, do Evangelho para justificar seus privilégios odiosos. Mas o único título legítimo para a posse de terra ser o calo na mão.” He continued to state that the main issue in Brazil was agrarian reform because “hunger was no longer just felt in the stomach but also in the head,” and that the peasant today “sabe que seus filhos não morre de fome porque Deus queira anjinhos no céu. Isso é do Evangelho dos escravos. E o céu é para homens livres e não para escravos.”

In a protest movement in Rio de Janeiro against the Law of National Security in September 1963, Alípio spoke about the “sub-vida” led by peasants and workers in Brazil. He attacked “imperialism” and “corrupt” organizations and projects such as IBAD, the Alliance for Progress, the Peace Corps which he claimed were false “assistance” programs that only wanted to “dominate the Brazilian people.”⁶⁵² He ended his speech with the hymn: “Ou ficar a Pátria livre, ou morrer pelo Brasil.” Alípio made such declarations - in support of the “revolution” that would come from the empty pans of the peasants to create a new Brazilian nation free of inequalities – frequently throughout the early 1960s. Alípio regularly spoke in support of Cuba and Socialist countries in Europe; for instance, he said that “the path of Cuba is the path of all the Latin American countries” in April 1963.⁶⁵³ “Devemos lembrar aqueles que parecem não acreditar que nossas montanhas pode transformar-se em outra Sierra

⁶⁵¹ “Deus não deseja essa miséria,” *LIGA* 7 August 1963, 2.

⁶⁵² “Só a revolução vo Brasileiro,” *LIGA* 29 September 1963, 1.

⁶⁵³ Quoting Pablo Neruda, Alípio claimed that Latin America is the Continent of Hope. “Pe. Alípio: Não seremos mais escravos de ninguém,” *LIGA* 3 April 1963, 4.

Maestra que a bandeira de Cuba é a unica bandeira que representará verdadeira liberdade.”

While Francisco Julião and other Ligas leaders faced arrests and imprisonments, Padre Alípio’s multiple arrests and lengthy imprisonments received even greater attention than other arrests in the Ligas newspaper. In response to an arrest in late 1962, Alípio claimed that he had been arrested and confined to the Forte de Cinco Pontes in Recife for writing an “Evangelho do Camponês.”⁶⁵⁴ The Brazilian Armed Forces claimed he was writing a new “evangelical” but Alípio responded saying that it was not “new or different than the evangelical message that Christ preached in the countryside, the mountains, the lakes, the cities and to the population of Judéia and of Galiléia.” He claimed that if Christ had been on the side of the rich, then He would have chosen the wealthy and educated as His Apostoles and Disciples, and this was not the case: Christ was born with the poor. Alípio claimed that his purpose, as a Priest of Christ, was to help the poor peasants in their struggle for freedom. And he claimed that Christ was present now in Brazil for another time of Galiléia. The reference clearly connected the first expropriated engenho in the Northeast (Engenho Galiléia) with the Biblical Galilee region.

Alípio was arrested and imprisoned again – held incommunicado – in April 1963, by the IV Exército following orders from the Minister of Defense, General Amaury Kruel, after the priest led a protest marking the one year anniversary of the assassination of João Pedro Teixeira, Ligas leader of Sapé.⁶⁵⁵ Reports in *LIGA* claimed that he had been kidnapped and held because of claims by the military that he

⁶⁵⁴ Padre Alípio de Freitas, “O evangelho do camponês,” *LIGA* 20 November 1962, 4.

⁶⁵⁵ “Padre Alípio seqüestrado por ordens de Kruel,” *LIGA* 10 April 1963, 2

was a “false priest, a communist, and Portuguese.”⁶⁵⁶ The statement alludes to his role as a “foreign agitator” in the attempt to delegitimize the priest as non-Brazilian. Reportedly, during Padre Alípio’s imprisonment, he was beaten and tortured.⁶⁵⁷ Francisco Julião wrote in a letter to the Minister of Justice, João Mangabeira, that Padre Alípio “permanence na mais absoluta incommunicabilidade, rompida com suplícios tântalos, denunciadas pelas famílias de sargentos e soldados, servindo no quartel do 15 RI em João Pessoa.”⁶⁵⁸ The Ligas declared that he was held incommunicado because of the state elections and his support for Miguel Arraes.⁶⁵⁹ According to the Ligas newspaper, protesters throughout the country demanded the release of Padre Alípio. A number of the placards from the protests were reprinted in *LIGA*, effectively expressing the irony of the Minister of Defense’s name, such as “OS FUNCIONÁRIOS PÚBLICOS EXIGEM A LIBERTAÇÃO DO PADRE ALÍPIO, KRUELMENTE PRESO.”⁶⁶⁰

According to the arrest report filed on 2 May 1963, Padre Alípio was held in prison as a preventative measure because he was a “nomad” without a fixed address, and sentenced to expulsion from Brazil for his subversive political activities and

⁶⁵⁶ “Padre Alípio prêso pelo IV Exército por Ordem de Krue,” *LIGA* 10 April 1963, 1.

⁶⁵⁷ “Padre Alípio espancado na prisão pelo cunhado de Veloso Borges,” *LIGA* 1 May 1963, 3.

⁶⁵⁸ “Julião ao Ministro da Justiça: padre Alípio foi torturado pelos ‘gorilas,’” *LIGA* 8 May 1963, 4.

⁶⁵⁹ “Organizar ligas camponesas, sindicatos rurais, denuncia a aspoliação de nossa patria pelos grupos estrangeiros, traxer para os amplos massas populares o verdadeiro sentido da religião do Cristo não consituem ameaça à Constituição Brasileira.” “Padre Alípio seqüestrado por ordens de Krue,” *LIGA* 10 April 1963, 2

⁶⁶⁰ “Operário de GB exigiram nas ruas libertação do padre Alípio,” *LIGA* 29 May 1963, 2.

connections to the Communist Party.⁶⁶¹ The police report found that he violated Article 141 of the Federal Constitution because of his activities with the Ligas in which he “pregar abertamente nos comícios, reuniões e conferencias os metados de propaganda de processos violentos para subverter a ordem política e social.” The accusations against Alípio were in the form of statements that the priest had made at political rallies and gatherings; for instance, “quem não estiver comigo está contra mim e será fuzilado,” “As Forças Armadas são antro de traidores,” and “o glorioso Exercito Nacional é nada mias nada menos que capitães de mato modernos e, quando começar a revolução, ai de quem usar as fardas traidores. Nem por brincadeira essa farda deverá ser colocada.”⁶⁶² Besides the statements against the Armed Forces, Padre Alípio also supposedly “used Communist techniques” to criticize the justice and legislative systems, stating: “O Poder Judiciário mantem justiça corrupta e venal,” and “O poder legislative não fará nenhuma reforma de base, uma vez que está mancomunado com grupos economicos e, portanto, só legisla contra os interesses do

⁶⁶¹ He violated Art. 11 (Fazer publicamente propaganda: a. de processos violentos para a subversão da ordem política ou social), Art. 12 (Incitar diretamente e de animo deliberado as classes sociais à luta pela violência), and Art. 17 (Instigar publicamente desobediência coletiva ao cumprimento da lei de ordem pública) of the Constitution which meant that he could be expelled according to Art. 33 because he was not born in Brazil: “o estrangeiro incurso em disposição desta lei será expulso do territorio nacional, sem prejuizo ds penas o que estiver sujeito, ressalvado, sempre o disposto no Art. 143 da Constituição Federal.” Delegacia Especializada de Ordem Política – São Paulo. No. 3477, Vol.8, DOPS. “Qualificação do indicado Padre Alípio Cristiano de Freitas,” 2 May 1963. Arquivo do Estado de São Paulo. DOPS-SP.

⁶⁶² Delegacia Especializada de Ordem Política – São Paulo. No. 3477, Vol.8, DOPS. “Qualificação do indicado Padre Alípio Cristiano de Freitas,” 2 May 1963. Arquivo do Estado de São Paulo. DOPS-SP.

povo e da nação.”⁶⁶³ The statements were “pre-fabricated” conferences that were heard throughout Brazil to subvert the Brazilian people (speaking in São Paulo in November 1962 at the Sindicato dos Gráficos, the Grémio Estudantil da Faculdade de Filosofia, and at the Faculdade de Direito da Universidade de São Paulo), which resulted in his arrest by the Polícia do Exército since he had violated the Law of National Security.

The Ligas insisted that the accusations against Alípio were unfounded and revealed the repressive plans of sectors of the Brazilian Armed Forces since nothing Alípio had done was “illegal.” In an appeal for the release of Padre Alípio, his lawyer referred to the case of Olga Benário, the pregnant partner of Luis Carlos Prestes who was deported to Nazi Germany to die in a concentration camp to suggest the “undemocratic” and “inhumane” consequences of the use of the Law of National Security.⁶⁶⁴ Julião claimed that it was a dangerous precedent to deport the priest that could be “adoindo contra outras patriotas, os quais adotaram a cidadania brasileira e que seria expulsos por motivos politicos, igualando-se o Governo Brasileiro a ditaduras.”⁶⁶⁵ Julião fought against the Law of National Security, arguing it should be abolished and condemned by the “national consciousness.”⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶³ Delegacia Especializada de Ordem Política – São Paulo. No. 3477, Vol.8, DOPS. “Qualificação do indicado Padre Alípio Cristiano de Freitas,” 2 May 1963. Arquivo do Estado de São Paulo. DOPS-SP.

⁶⁶⁴ “Porque mantém o Padre Alípio prêso e incomunicável?” *LIGA* 5 June 1963, 6.

⁶⁶⁵ “Kruel quer mesmo expulsar Pe. Alípio: nacionalistas reagem,” *LIGA* 29 May 1963, 1.

⁶⁶⁶ “Porque mantém o Padre Alípio prêso e incomunicável?” *LIGA* 5 June 1963, 6. Upon his release, Padre Alípio also spoke against the Law of National Security, arguing that it was absurd and a threat to the Brazilian people who fell subject to arrest and imprisonment that could change with the political motivation of the day. “Pe. Alípio em faculdades,” *LIGA* 28 August 1963, 2.

While in prison, the Padre Alípio published an interesting article about freedom of speech and peasants. According to the article, Padre Alípio's imprisonment was much easier to understand for the worker than the peasant since the worker was "already accustomed to this type of fascism in which the freedom of speech is only a myth."⁶⁶⁷ The article defined the religious nature of the peasant and reveals the power attributed to Padre Alípio:

"O camponês é um místico. Crescendo com o temor a Deus enraizado na sua mente, o homem do campo respeita e admira o sacerdote, nele vendo um enviado do Senhor, cujos atos e palavras não podem ser julgados pelos homens da terra. Para o camponês, padre Alípio representa a bandeira da libertação muitas vezes valorizada por ser seu portador um homem da batina, igual no aspecto aos muitos que já conheceu, mas com linguajar completamente diferente. (...) O sacerdote do povo mostrava-lhes o caminho ensinado por Jesus Cristo que é o de igualdade e justiça, preconizando um mundo sem ricos e pobres, mas todos iguais, lutando pelos mesmos ideais de paz e fraternidade."⁶⁶⁸

According to the article, peasants could not believe that a priest would talk like Alípio who worried about their life on Earth, their suffering and their struggles. His imprisonment supposedly only proved the extent to which the leaders of the Ligas were willing to go to support the peasant masses.⁶⁶⁹

While in prison, Padre Alípio gained notoriety and bolstered his own image, allying himself directly with Pope John XXIII. He claimed to be held in prison because he was the first religious figure, a "pioneer," to side with the poor in the struggle for their freedom.⁶⁷⁰ He also sought to identify himself with historic priests who had been imprisoned in the Northeast such as Padre José Inácio Ribeiro de

⁶⁶⁷ "Do ponto de vista camponês: A bandeira do padre Alípio," *LIGA* 5 June 1963, 3.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁰ "Padre Alípio à imprensa: 'Estou com os pobres hoje e sempre,'" *LIGA* 12 June 1963, 1.

Abreu Lima – Padre Roma – who was shot by a firing squad in Bahia in 1817; Padre Tenório Pedro de Souza, hanged in Recife in 1917; and Frei Caneca, executed in 1825.⁶⁷¹ Padre Alípio also claimed that the Jesus Christ had been subjected to the same type of imprisonment and death sentence. Padre Alípio was released and continued to be a leader in the Ligas, also editing the Ligas newspaper, until he went into exile in Mexico following the 1964 coup. If he had not escaped to Mexico, he would have faced a prison sentence of 39 years.⁶⁷²

Anti-Communist Catholicism and the Northeastern Church

In addition to portraying Julião as a fanatic, those who raised a critical voice against the Ligas and Leftist politicians also used the Bible or religious ideology to attack “communism.” That is to say, that the dominant Catholic narrative also continued to circulate throughout this period, and was used to uphold the status quo. For instance, in a cordel published in the *Diario de Pernambuco* around the time of the 1962 elections, João José da Silva labeled Miguel Arraes an “Anti-Christ.” “O candidato vermelho/ Protegido pelos seus/ Companheiros de jornada/ E todos eles ateus. O nome do candidato/ Todos sabem – é Arraes./ O Anti-Cristo em pessoa/ É o próprio

⁶⁷¹ “Mensagem dos maçons ao Padre Alípio,” *LIGA* 19 June 1963, 2.

⁶⁷² Secretária da Segurança Pública – São Paulo. No. 146.971 Alípio Cristiano de Freitas, Fichado. “Auto de Qualificações de Interrogatório.” 30 November 1970, Rio de Janeiro. Arquivo do Estado de São Paulo. DOPS-SP.

Satanás/ Que em figura de gente/ Do nosso voto anda atrás.”⁶⁷³ Other poems also expressed similar claims about Communism and its threat to Northeastern society.

One folheto written in strong opposition to the Ligas was “História da Reforma Agrária e o Comunismo no Brasil” by Joaquim Batista de Sena, sometimes known as Poeta Seny.⁶⁷⁴ The poem starts by setting up a Manichaean conflict between Catholicism and Communism, stating that the world is in danger because of communism, “Satan’s jewel,” while instructing that “O Crente da lei de Deus/ não adota o comunismo” [The Believer of the law of God/ doesn’t accept communism]. Sena provides a history of Jesus Christ’s struggles on earth, including the “saints and martyrs” who died in the Roman Coliseum, and the guidance that Christ provided for Pedro Alvarez Cabral in 1500 that allowed him to arrive in Brazil. According to Poeta Seny, this divine history is why Brazil owes its patriotism to Christianity and not to Communism. He encourages the audience to “fight for the law of the true God to liberate Brazil from the foreign communism that is attacking the Brazilian nation.”

⁶⁷³ João José da Silva, “História do Anti-Cristo que anda solto no mundo ou A queda do Coração de Jesus,” *Diário de Pernambuco* 2 September 1962, 7. The cordel was about a meeting between Arraes and the prefeito Genaro Carazzoni in També, Pernambuco, “o cais do porto ao sertão.”

The Recife PCB newspaper, *A Hora* published an article responding to those who claimed Arraes was a Communist by the counter claim that Arraes was following the path of Jesus, not of the Communists. “Lembro aos que lhe acusam de comunista que a frase que abaixo cito não é nem de Arraes, nem de Prestes, nem do falecido Stalin. É de Jesus: ‘É mais fácil um camelo passar pelo fundo de uma agulha, do que um rico entrar no reino do céu.’ Rico ruim, é claro. Rico egoísta, usurpador, indigno de pertencer à espécie humana. Rico como aqueles vendilhões que Jesus expulsou do Templo.” Nelson Firmo, “Arraes e uma frase de Jesús,” *A Hora*, 26 May – 2 June 1962, 3.

⁶⁷⁴ Joaquim Batista de Sena/Poeta Seny, *História da Reforma Agrária e o Comunismo no Brasil*. Fortaleza, Ceará. n.p., n.d. (From the topics discussed, the folheto probably was published in the 1960s.)

According to poem, it is a “lie” that the poor “bread baker” in Russia makes the same salary as an “engineer,” and it is a “lie” that the poor baker eats at the same table next to the obstetrician. It is not true that the son of the poorest worker studies at the same school as the son of Russian nobles. While more people may be literate in Russia, the schools teach the children from the time they are babies that God does not exist. In fact, to speak of God is a crime, and anyone who speaks against the government has their heads cut off. Through a reading of this folheto, it is possible to make a reasonable assumption about the rhetoric used by the “left” as well as the “right.” Poeta Seny apparently wanted to challenge ideas circulating about promises for equality and social justice by mobilizing a different debate that involved religion. Inequality, he writes, is a “Divine Phenomenon” since God made some people completely healthy and others blind and crippled; some people millionaires and others poor homeless men. To challenge these natural divisions is against the law of God, and thus Communism – which Poeta Seny depicts as promoting social equality – should be rejected to save one’s soul.

An editorial in August of 1963 referred to the words of the prophet Ezequiel as a warning and guide for the “agony of our present.”⁶⁷⁵ The passage was interpreted to mean that “those who threaten the order, the peace, the tranquility of

⁶⁷⁵ “A lição do Profeta Ezequiel,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 22 August 1963, 4. The passage used, from Chapter 33, “a message from Aquilão, na grande ‘nuvem de fogo,’ e na moldura dos quarto animais com aspecto de homem: ‘quando eu levar à terra a minha espada, se a sentinela, escolhida pelo povo, vendo a espada que vem contra a terra tocar sua buzina, advertindo a comunidade e esta não se acautelar, virá a espada, e lhe tirará a vida, e o seu sangue cairá sobre sua cabeça; mas se a sentinela vir que vem a espada e não tocar a buzina, de forma que o povo seja avisado, se vier a espada e tirar a vida a um deles, este tal perecerá devido à sua iniquidade, mas eu perderei contas de seu sangue à sentinela.’”

the Pernambucan family, above all in the rural areas, as if they were a new sword of God, shot against the earth and against the community, will have erred too much, sinned too much, to not pay for the bad fortune they have brought. (...) Those chosen by God need to remember this. (...) What is inadmissible is this situation of hate, of misunderstanding, of exaggerated passion, whose fatal undoing will be the subversion of all, destruction, chaos.” The author warns that the landowners are cutting back on their agricultural production because of the social unrest, and this will have the greatest consequences for the rural workers who will be the principal victims. The editorial ends with a warning to the elected state officials:

“E o poder público, a sentinela escolhida pelo povo para o orientar e dirigir, se falhar na sua missão, de tocar a buzinha da advertência oportuna, acabará o maior responsável por este estendal de infortúnios: no julgamento de Deus e dos homens, será servera a prestação de contas, - do sangue que se derramar, das vidas que se perderem, da desolação que desabar sobre a comunidade.”⁶⁷⁶

It is well known that the military leaders and their supporters made strong use of Biblical ideas of protecting the Brazilian family from Communists – especially with the right-wing women’s movement that led “rosary marches” to support the military such as the March 19, 1964 demonstration in São Paulo, “March of the Family with God for Liberty,” and the Pernambucan Movimento Feminino pela Liberdade march on 7 March 1964. Judging from a number of classified documents in the U.S. National Archives, it is clear that military efforts to support a Catholic anti-Communist movement existed well before the coup. For example, the U.S. Consul General in Recife reported a conversation with “special agents” of the Brazilian IV Army Unit, Armando Braga and Malebrance Bernardo, who “requested

⁶⁷⁶ “A lição do Profeta Ezequiel,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 22 August 1963, 4.

background information on communism, Cuba and anti-communist tactics.”⁶⁷⁷

The men told the consulate officials that they were involved in organizing “anti-communist movements and organizations” in the Northeast such as the Movimento Estudantil Democrático and the Sociedade de Estudos do Nordeste, as well as other Catholic anti-communist groups. The men worked at “printing leaflets and distributing same in Recife and interior. They claim to have been involved in the squelching of the Communists in Caruaru, Pernambuco.” When offered the USIS anti-Communist material, the men said it was unacceptable because “it was printed on good paper, used good grammar, there were no misspellings and all accent marks were correctly placed. Bernardo said they would probably never be able to use the USIS material as long as it was of such top quality printing and paper.” This statement shows the perceived need to provide an “authentic” opposition to the Ligas Camponesas from Nordestino people themselves, and shows how the opposition manifested itself in Catholic movements with support from the U.S. government.

But the use of religion to attack “communism” also emerged at a time when Biblical interpretations were changing; for instance with the interpretations of Francisco Julião and the Ligas Camponesas and with certain divisions within the Northeastern Catholic Church. The difficulty in discussing the Church in Brazil and in the Northeast is that it was divided; it did not operate with one voice.⁶⁷⁸ Some of

⁶⁷⁷ Brazil. U.S. Embassy. Classified General Records, 1941-1963. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State. Operations Memorandum To USIS Rio from USIS Recife, Subject: Distribution of Unattributed Material Folder. Confidential. 15 June 1961. RG 84, Box 350.21, Communism.

⁶⁷⁸ As David Mutchler claimed, “A study of the provincial declarations (...) reveals a basic split between the bishops of the Northeast and most of those in the middle

the Northeastern priests were radical leaders portrayed as a threat in the U.S. media and in government documents because of their views on agrarian reform and “revolution.” Many of these priests faced the same type of repression (arrest, imprisonment, torture and death) during the military regime as other “leftist” leaders.⁶⁷⁹ Other priests took a more conservative view with attacks on the threat of communism more important than initiating social reforms.

The radicalization of the Catholic Church was not limited to Brazil, but also came from “above” with Pope John XXIII (1958-1963), known as the “People’s Pope,” the “Papa-camponês,” and the “Good Pope (il papa buono).” Pope John XXIII called for the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), which gave rise to ideas associated with liberation theology. He published the encyclicals *Mater et Magistra* (Mother and Teacher, 1961) and *Pacem in terris* (Peace on Earth, 1963). These documents emphasized the obligation for developed countries to help underdeveloped countries and people, through education and development of agricultural techniques, and created an idea of “citizenship” and human rights. He condemned colonialism and imperialism as well as the use of nuclear weapons and war.⁶⁸⁰

In a 1965 article on the Catholic Church in Brazil, David Mutchler divided Brazilian Bishops into four categories: Extremists, conservatives, moderates and revolutionary or progressive bishops. In the book, *Reforma Agrária: questão de*

(Minas Gerais) and near South (Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo).” Mutchler, “Roman Catholicism in Brazil,” 104.

⁶⁷⁹ After the coup on 1 May 1964, *Informationes Catholiques Internationales* published a report that “Catholic leaders have been tortured, priests imprisoned and bishops threatened...” The Army questioned most of the Northeastern Bishops and searched their residences, and the bishop of Natal, Dom Eugenio de Araujo Sales was denounced as a communist. Ibid., 103-117.

⁶⁸⁰ “Papa João XXIII condena o colonialismo e a guerra,” *LIGA* 24 April 1963, 6.

consciencia (1960), the “extremist” bishops and laymen of São Paulo claimed that private property was a “moral absolute.”⁶⁸¹ The political situation in Brazil was allegedly threatening to undermine the “Christian patrimony of the Brazilian people” and Brazilian society’s “basic values: tradition, family and property.”⁶⁸² The “conservative” bishops, such as Dom Jaime Barros Camara, Archbishop of Rio de Janeiro, took the stance that social reforms were needed, advocating “spiritual means” for the solution to social problems, but remaining staunchly anti-communist.⁶⁸³ The “moderate” bishops, headed by Cardinal Vasconcellos Motta, took the view that the Church must stay aloof from politics. They were concerned about the threat of communism but advocated social reforms, claiming the “Church is the Church of the Poor.”⁶⁸⁴ And, the “radical” wing - associated in 1964 with Dom Helder Camara and prior to this with Dom Eugênio Salles in Natal - thought that the Church needed to ally itself with the working class, the peasants and the urban poor. This group supposedly did not take a strong anti-communist stance, blaming the Brazilian elite and foreign imperialists for the problems in Brazil.⁶⁸⁵

The Encontros dos Bispos do Nordeste in 1959 and 1960 trace the changing political position of the Church in the Northeast.⁶⁸⁶ The meetings were established to discuss the problems of the Northeast such as rural poverty and emigration, and to

⁶⁸¹ Mutchler, “Roman Catholicism in Brazil,” 104. Mutchler labels the bishops as “extremist” versus “conservative.”

⁶⁸² Ibid.

⁶⁸³ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid., 105.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid., 105-106.

⁶⁸⁶ Robin Nagle argues that the liberal Church in Pernambuco actually began in the 1930s with Dom Sebastião Leme. Robin Nagle, *Claiming the Virgin: The Broken Promise of Liberation Theology in Brazil* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 41.

talk about the role the Church could play in working for solutions. These meetings linked the Catholic Church to developmental programs for the Northeast, namely OPENO (Operação Nordeste) and SUDENE. The meeting notes show how intricately involved the Church was in developmental projects throughout the Northeast, promoting the development of agriculture and agricultural mechanization, colonization programs, drought-related projects, radio education programs for rural areas, and rural labor leader training programs.⁶⁸⁷ The Church supported State-led development projects because the Church believed that long-term transformations in the structure of the Northeast were needed to solve the problems of hunger and misery.⁶⁸⁸ In May of 1963, the Comissão Central da Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil made a statement in support of agrarian reform and “reformas de base,” citing *Mater et Magistra* as their motivation.⁶⁸⁹

Although the publications suggest a unified voice coming from the Northeast, it is clear that multiple voices sought different plans for change in the Northeast. And, while a number of influential Church leaders opposed the tactics of the Ligas, and the Ligas, in turn, opposed many of the Church supported development projects – such as the increase of the wage for cane workers, the colonization projects, and SUDENE⁶⁹⁰

⁶⁸⁷ *II Encontro dos Bispos do Nordeste: Convênios* (Natal; Rio: Serviço de Informação Agrícola, Ministério da Agricultura, 1960).

⁶⁸⁸ Padre Antônio Melo, at a speech at the conference “O Problema Agrária na zona canavieira de Pernambuco” at the Instituto Joaquim Nabuco de Pesquisas Sociais. (Recife: Imprensa Universitária, 1965), 118.

⁶⁸⁹ “A Igreja e as reformas,” *Diário de Pernambuco* 19 May 1963, 8.

⁶⁹⁰ The Ligas believed that the only way to have long-standing change in the Northeast was through radical agrarian reform, or the reappropriation of land for the people who had been working and living on large estates. While many claimed that Julião opposed SUDENE and Colonization projects because such projects would lessen his leadership role and power, Julião claimed that his opposition was rooted in

– it is difficult to speak of the Church or the Ligas as unified voices in opposition to one another. Much of the historiography has divided the movements along these lines, but the overlaps between all of the movements (PCB, Ligas and Church) make these distinctions superficial at best. For this reason, I prefer to examine the political statements and actions of specific priests in the Northeast.

A few key figures involved in the rural workers movements exemplify the differences in the Catholic Church of the Northeast. Padre Alípio de Freitas was clearly one of the most radical priests, but other also priests voiced radical views about power relations in the rural Northeast.⁶⁹¹ One example of certain radical views appeared in a 1962 article in *Time Magazine*: “in a recent fiery sermon by Padre Emerson Negreiros, a rotund padre who runs the busiest rural syndicate in the cotton town of Santa Cruz [Rio Grande do Norte] and preaches a do-it-yourself justice to his peasant flock: ‘You should raise a goat to give milk to your children. If the landlord comes to kill your goat, he is threatening the lives of your children. Do not let him kill your goat! Kill him first!’”⁶⁹² Some other notable priests in the Northeast included: Monsenhor Ruy Barreira Vieira, (Padre Ruy) of Souza, Paraíba; Aloísio Guerra of Campina Grande, Paraíba; Dom Antônio Fragoso of Crateús, Paraíba; Juarez Benício of Paraíba; Dom José Tavora, Archbishop of Sergipe; Antonio

the fact that such programs did not significantly change the land tenure structure of the Northeast, and thus, did not best serve the interests of the peasants who were involved in the Ligas.

⁶⁹¹ In a 1964 article on the Brazilian Church in *The Journal of Inter-American Studies*, Manoel Cardozo explains that the French-schooled Dominicans in Brazil were the most radicalized wing. The Catholic newspaper, *Brasil Urgente!*, was depicted as the “most controversial newspaper in Brazil,” that “preached agrarian reform,” saw Fidel Castro as a “teacher,” and claimed that “Communist” countries were “Socialist.” Cardozo, “The Brazilian Church and the New Left,” 313-321.

⁶⁹² “Brazil: The Hungry Land,” *Time* 18 May 1962, 31-32.

Campeiro de Aragão of Petrolina, Pernambuco; Guilherme Andrade of Pesqueira, Pernambuco; Dom Eugenio Sales, Archbishop of Rio Grande do Norte; and, Antonio Melo and Paulo Crespo of Pernambuco. A US Consular report providing lists of potential political threats listed the following priests as being supporters of “socialism and agrarian reform,” highlighting the Church’s radicalism in the states of Ceará, Paraíba and Pernambuco: Padre Bruno Archimedes (Ceará); Padre Helio (Ceará); and, Bishop Eugenio Salles (Rio Grande do Norte).⁶⁹³

While the number of Catholic priests involved in the struggle for agrarian reform clearly deserves more detailed attention, I focus on Padres Melo and Crespo, who were two of the most outspoken and controversial figures in the Catholic Church and received a great deal of publicity, facilitating access to their political views and projects. Both these priests led rural worker movements in municipalities with strong Ligas and PCB movements, providing a direct challenge, and both priests were involved in violent confrontations in their respective municipalities in 1963.⁶⁹⁴

Questions were raised about Padre Crespo’s alleged association with the CIA and about Padre Melo’s financing from IBAD, turning both of them into controversial

⁶⁹³ Brazil. U.S. Embassy. Classified General Records, 1941-1963. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State. Foreign Service Dispatch From Amembassy Rio to Dept of State. Confidential. “The Brazilian Northeast: A status report on Politico-Economic Conditions.” Special report on Northeast prepared for Amb. Merwin L. Bohan, head of the Special NE Study Team by Consul Edward T Walters of the Am Consulate General, Recife, For the Ambassador Philip Raine, Counselor of Embassy for Political Affairs. 19 December 1961. RG 84, Box 128, Folder 500 Northeast 1961. National Archives.

⁶⁹⁴ As Eul-Soo Pang argues, both priests were “enormously successful in combating the leftist unions.” Supposedly, Padre Melo’s leagues numbered 60,000. This challenge led to the “loose labeling of such priests as Catholic rightists or radicals.” Eul-Soo Pang, “The Changing Roles of Priests in the Politics of Northeast Brazil, 1889-1964,” *The Americas* 30, no. 3 (January 1974): 341-372, 368.

figures in the Northeast. But, in later interviews with Ligas leaders, many claimed that Padre Crespo was more aligned with the problems of the rural workers whereas Padre Melo was seen as “less trustworthy” and as a “demagogue.”⁶⁹⁵

Padre Paulo Crespo led the Church Federation of Rural Workers (sometimes referred to as the Legiões Agrárias de Pernambuco) and SORPE (Serviço de Orientação Rural de Pernambuco) in Jaboatão, Pernambuco, and became a leading spokesman for the movement. As he stated in 1962: “O Nordeste é a area problema de hemisfério. Isto não porque seja a única onde há miséria ou de todas as areas subdesenvolvidas a mais miserável, mas porque seu povo hoje, não está mais disperso, amorfo, mas, tomou consciência de sua miséria, não quer mais permanecer na miséria. No entanto não sabe ainda o caminho para conseguir sua própria libertação.”⁶⁹⁶ Crespo’s declarations suggest a play for power in the rural movements, expressing the idea that agrarian reform and unionization were necessary because of the situation of unrest and the Church was the safest authority to lead such unions and projects.⁶⁹⁷ Crespo also quoted Pope John XXIII and the encyclical *Mater et Magistra* to legitimize his position about the need for agrarian reform and rural unions.⁶⁹⁸

⁶⁹⁵ Clóvis Ribeiro de Rego Melo, interview by Eliane Moury Fernandes and Jorge Zaverucha, 16 November 1984, CEHIBRA da Fundação Joaquim Nabuco de Pesquisas Sociais, Recife: 20.

⁶⁹⁶ “Padre Crespo vê na sindicalização rural a última esperança do trabalhador do campo,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 17 August 1962, 11.

⁶⁹⁷ Padre Crespo claimed that the Church was needed because “o movimento sindical rural poderá cair nas mãos dos comunistas e consequentemente, será a derrocada da democracia.” Ibid.

⁶⁹⁸ Quoting from *Mater et Magistra*, Crespo declared, “O Nosso pensamento afetuoso e o Nosso Paternal estimulo dirigem-se para as associações profissionais e dos

On a number of occasions, Padre Crespo went to the police to support peasants who were involved in the movement to form rural unions associated with the Church. He took a strong stance against “unjust” large landowners, labeling them as “slave masters” who used their money to put politicians in power who supported their dominance.⁶⁹⁹ The violence and injustice that many of these priests observed in the countryside led them to support the rural workers and peasants. For instance, Padre Crespo supported Adelino Vicente, a member of the Sindicato Rural de Vitória, when landowner Miguel Paisinho tried to throw him off the fazenda. Crespo described a situation when he was meeting with Vicente at his house and the landowner and six capangas (hired thugs) armed with revolvers, and threatened Vicente’s wife and children, throwing all the furniture out of the house and threatening to burn everything.⁷⁰⁰

At a time of heightened tensions in Jaboatão in late August of 1963, the *Diario de Pernambuco* reported that storeowners were closing their businesses in fear of attacks by rural workers. The Minister of Labor had legalized one rural union of Jaboatão (led by the Church) and the workers had been electing the first leaders a few days prior to the unrest. The workers entered into a conflict because the “communist” workers supposedly tried to influence the elections, which led to mass protest. Communist-influenced rural workers reportedly threatened to attack the Igreja Matriz

movimentos sindicais de inspiração cristã, presentes e ativos em varios Continentes.”
Ibid.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁰ “Padre denuncia fazendeiro que destruiu a casa de um camponês,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 6 May 1962, 5.

in Jaboatão in an act of revenge against Padre Crespo.⁷⁰¹ After receiving death threats, Padre Crespo supposedly took refuge in a convent in Recife, leaving Padre Celestino Capra in control.⁷⁰² Such violent incidents raised questions about the effectiveness of the Church to lead rural movements, since it seemed as though the opposition to the Church led rural workers to leave the Church and join PCB rural unions.⁷⁰³

Padre Antônio Melo led the Catholic rural union movement in Cabo, Pernambuco as well as the colonization and cooperative land projects in the area.⁷⁰⁴ Padre Melo appeared more frequently in the mainstream newspapers, which quoted and reported on his activities and political statements more often than Padre Crespo. In a 1963 USIA study on the rural Northeast which entailed conducting interviews with about 1000 rural Nordestinos, Padre Melo was the only Catholic priest who surveyors included in their questions, asking about rural people's knowledge of and opinion of Melo.⁷⁰⁵ As Antonio Campeiro de Aragão of Petrolina said of Melo, "um homem que vive a vida dos camponeses, lutando por eles sem quaisquer interesses

⁷⁰¹ "Comércio de Jaboatão cerra portas temendo camponeses," *Diario de Pernambuco* 29 August 1963, 1.

⁷⁰² "Fúria vermelha em Jaboatão: Juiz é insultado e Padre Crespo refugia-se no Recife," *Diario de Pernambuco* 29 August 1963, 3.

⁷⁰³ "Padre Melo adverte Governador: Resistirá a novas violencias," *Diario de Pernambuco* 6 September 1963, 3.

⁷⁰⁴ "Padre Melo prega a reforma agrária: É anti-Marxista," *Diario de Pernambuco* 15 May 1963, 3.

⁷⁰⁵ The other figures who received similar attention included Francisco Julião, Jango Goulart, Miguel Arraes and Fidel Castro. Brazil. Country Project Files, 1951 – 1960. Records of the US information agency (USIA). "Rural NE Study: Tabulations of Close-End Questions, São Paulo, May, 1963. RG 306, Box 14, Folder BR 6302. National Archives.

políticos.”⁷⁰⁶ This statement about Melo exemplifies the tactic of the Church to seek legitimacy in portraying the Church as a “non-political” actor in the Northeast.

Padre Melo frequently made declarations downplaying the threat of communism in the countryside in Northeastern Brazil. For instance, commenting on the march initiated by Julião in Brasília in early 1962, Melo claimed that such marches gave an erroneous view of the peasants as communists, when in fact, their protests were only motivated by hunger.⁷⁰⁷ Testifying for the CPI (Comissão Parlamentar de Inquérito sobre as Ligas Camponesas), Melo explained that communism was not a threat because the Northeastern Communists were bourgeois politicians, incapable of “leaving their armchairs” to start a revolution.⁷⁰⁸ He emphasized the need for agrarian reform in the Northeast since the camponês suffers from “fome física, fome de cultura, de civilização e de justiça.”⁷⁰⁹ Melo also did not turn the large landowners into the enemy, claiming that many landowners were also concerned about the misery in the countryside.⁷¹⁰ Instead, what was needed was “to stimulate agricultural production, modernize it, and demand just legislation.”⁷¹¹

But in mid-1963, around the same time of the protests involving Padre Crespo in Jaboatão, Padre Melo also became the focus of a controversy and violence.

⁷⁰⁶ “Bispo inicia movimento de defesa do Nordeste,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 21 January 1962, 3.

⁷⁰⁷ “O Nordeste não é comunista; apenas luta contra a miséria – declara o padre Melo,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 27 January 1962, 5.

⁷⁰⁸ “Padre Melo Depôs: Reforma agrária ou então convulsão social,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 6 May 1962, 1.

⁷⁰⁹ “Padre Melo Depôs: Reforma agrária ou então convulsão social,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 6 May 1962, 1.

⁷¹⁰ “Padre Melo: não há comunismo no NE, mas insatisfação,” *O Estado de São Paulo* 5 May 1962.

⁷¹¹ Ibid.

According to the *Diário de Pernambuco*, the Pernambucan police had invaded the Cabo post of IBAD, and held the director at gunpoint, demanding a statement that proved Padre Melo was financed by IBAD.⁷¹² The police, now under orders from Miguel Arraes and João Goulart, demanded that the IBAD office close its office since it was supposedly a “foreign” institution with the sole purpose of causing unrest.⁷¹³ An editorial in the *Diario de Pernambuco* denounced the governor’s actions as being comparable to the “savagery of the Wild West,” writing in support of the “anti-communist” techniques of IBAD and in support of Padre Melo’s efforts to organize rural workers.⁷¹⁴ To oppose the “unrest” allegedly instigated by Arraes who wanted “to turn Pernambuco into a barrel of gunpowder and civil war,” the editorial quoted Dantas Barreto (1911) who argued that the government’s principal responsibility was to maintain order.⁷¹⁵

After the Military Coup of 1964

*La falta de libertad, la violencia de la represión, las injusticias, el empobrecimiento del pueblo y la enajenación de los intereses nacionales al capital extranjero no pueden constituir una señal de que el Brasil haya encontrado el camino de su afirmación histórica.*⁷¹⁶

- Dom Helder Câmara, 1974

⁷¹² “Padre Melo adverte Governador: Resistirá a novas violências,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 6 September 1963, 3.

⁷¹³ Ibid.

⁷¹⁴ “Os episódios do Cabo,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 6 September 1963, 4.

⁷¹⁵ Ibid.

⁷¹⁶ Helder Camara y obispos de Brasil, *El Grito del tercer mundo: en um pueblo marginado. Milagro brasileño? Testimonios* (Buenos Aires: Merayo Editor, 1974), 39.

In an editorial in the *Diario de Pernambuco* in May 1964 on rural unionization, Costo Porto stated that the “flag of rural unionization until recently had been in the wrong hands, of those subversives of humanity,” but now, the flag has returned to the “right hands, those of the Church, as clearly stated in *Mater et Magistra*.”⁷¹⁷ Porto quoted the Pope as recognizing the need for rural cooperatives and professional associations. He argued that the large landowners should support rural unionization because the opposite would mean “the threat of tumult in the life of the peasant, disorder, insecurity, agitation, workers’ rebellions and all else that was present during the dark and unfortunate days of the mysticism and turbulence of Arrais.”⁷¹⁸ He concluded the editorial: “Se cometemos o grande e imperdoável crime de deixar que a bandeira da sindicalização fosse ter a outras mãos, chegou a hora de acertar o caminho, reivindicando-a para a democracia e transformando-a uma das tónicas de nossa batalha de consolidação do movimento de 31 de março.”⁷¹⁹

Besides the fact that many of the leaders of the Ligas and the PCB were arrested after the military coup, a number of new leaders in the Church fostered a shift in the rural movement. Dom Helder Câmara was instated as the Archbishop of the Diocese of Olinda two weeks prior to the coup, and Dom José Maria Pires (Dom Pelé) became the Archbishop of Paraíba in 1966. While Padres Melo and Crespo remained involved in rural unionization and cooperatives, they also faced challenges to their right to lead these movements, and were interrogated and arrested after the coup. Such challenges faced by these priests is evidenced by a declaration in the

⁷¹⁷ Costa Porto, “Sindicalização rural,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 15 May 1964, 4.

⁷¹⁸ Ibid.

⁷¹⁹ Ibid.

Diario de Pernambuco by Padre Crespo in June 1964:

“É conhecida de todos a oposição sistematica que me fizeram os comunistas no governo passado, negando pão e aguaao movimento camponês que orientava: intervindo nos sindicatos democratas, invadindo suas sedes, empiquetando Estrada (...) para que os camponeses democratas não fizessem passeata de protesto contra a invasão do sindicato de minha cidade de Jaboatão; enfim, chegando ao ponto de me ameaçaram de morte, nnao podendo permanecer em minha casa, sem grave risco de vida, fato este amplamente divulgado pela imprensa, naqueles dias.

Tendo, no entanto, a responsabilidade do movimento camponês, precisava de continuar a manter contactos nas areas governamentais, para sobreviver com o movimento. Não negligencieei, porém, de informar o progresso da subversão em marcha ao commando do IV Exercito, na pessoa do então general Humberto de Alencar Castelo Branco...minha posição foi manifestada em relatorios escritos, em telegramas e em programas de televisão, quando denunciemos elementos agitadores que intraquilizavam os campos. Diante de muitos se calavam, quando deviam advertir, nós falamos e denunciemos de publico o que foi objeto de amplos comentarios da imprensa local.

Minha posição é bem conhecida. Sou contra o comunismo. Sempre combati. (...) Sempre defendi o trabalhador, o camponês anonimo, construtor da nossa patria contra as injustiça de poderosas sem coração sem fé e sem amore a Deus. Sempre dialoguei com todos, ricos e pobres, patrões e operários, amigos e contraditores.

Posso alguma vez ter errado. Quem não errou? Quantos se omitiram criminosamente? Pelo menos eu não me omiti. Tentei uma luta de Davi contra Golias (SUPRA, CGT, CONSINTRA e extremismo de direita e de esquerda). Quem não errou, jogue a primeira pedra.

Tenho a consciencia nítida de que estou dando meu contribuito à minha patria e à minha Igreja, ajudando outros a construir um Brasil melhor, sem privilegios acintosos à miseria revoltante, dentro de um clima de justiça, unico fundamento do progresso, da ordem e da paz.”⁷²⁰

The statement by Padre Crespo suggests that he was feeling threatened during the first months of the military regime and felt insecure about his position as a leader in the rural unionization project. His declaration indicates the possibility of

⁷²⁰ “Esclarecimentos do Padre Crespo,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 21 June 1964, 9.

denunciations that he supported communists and created rural unrest. In response, he tried to align himself with the Church and the military regime, and emphasized the idea that he wanted to work with a multiclass alliance to alleviate the “misery” of the countryside. But, Padre Crespo never mentioned the process of *conscientização*, or of empowering the rural workers and peasants in the Northeast.

Almost immediately after his reassignment to Pernambuco (two weeks before the military coup), Dom Helder Camara had to directly confront the military regime about the arrests and torture that occurred in the early days of the dictatorship. While his position radicalized over time, even in the early days of the coup he spoke against the mistreatment of political prisoners, even those associated with the Communist Party. One of the most visible cases of torture and human rights abuse was that of Gregório Bezerra, PCB leader of the rural unions. Bezerra had been beaten in public, tied to a horse, and dragged through the streets. In a later interview, Bezerra described Dom Helder Câmara:

“Eu sempre tive uma enorme admiração por Dom Helder Câmara. Sei que ele é sistematicamente anticomunista, antisoviético, mas julgo que ele teve um papel fundamental aqui na história do Partido. Ele denunciou os crimes, as torturas, os sequestro e a sua voz contribuiu muito parece...Eu acho que a posição de D. Helder foi muito positivo. Ele é um homem culto, inteligente, e muito hábil.”⁷²¹

As Dom Helder Camara’s position solidified against the military regime, stories about him being a “red” or “communist” Bishop also increased. By December 1964, Dom Helder had started to make international declarations about the situation in the Northeast, presenting the argument that Communism was not a threat in the region since the “impoverished masses cannot understand” the meaning of

⁷²¹ Gregório Bezerra, interview by Eliane Moury Fernandes, 28 May 1982. (Recife: CEHIBRA da Fundação Joaquim Nabuco de Pesquisas Sociais), 169.

Communism. Dom Helder stated that charity was always well-received in the Northeast but “consciousness-raising” of the impoverished masses, was seen as a threat and caused the large landowners to declare such projects “communist.”⁷²² Dom Helder continued to press for development projects in the Northeast and the need to change the structures that perpetuated the misery of the Nordestinos.

As the dictatorship continued and grew increasingly repressive after AI-5 in 1968, the Northeastern Church was a target of repressive measures such as arrests, threats, and occasional spraying of bullets on the Archdiocesan buildings.⁷²³ One of Dom Helder’s assistants, Antonio Henrique da Silva Neto, was found dead on a Recife street in May 1969 with signs of physical torture.⁷²⁴ Two American priests were arrested in Recife in December of 1968 on the charges of being “serious subversives.”⁷²⁵ Dom Helder Câmara also intensified his statements against the regime locally, nationally and internationally. For example, in a 1972 letter he wrote that the authorities seem to be convinced that the subversion had moved from the

⁷²² Helder Camara, “Conscious and Anti-Communism,” *The Commonweal* 18 December 1964, 407-408.

⁷²³ Joseph Page, “The Little Priest Who Stands Up To Brazil’s Generals,” *New York Times* 23 May 1971, SM26.

⁷²⁴ The priest was one of the key assistants of Dom Helder, active in social-aid programs in Recife, and had studied sociology in the United States. His body showed that he had been tied with ropes and stabbed to death. The accused murderers were allegedly associated with the Communist Hunters Command, a right-wing militia group. Bruce Handler, “Brazil Probing 1969 Slaying of Liberal Priest,” *Washington Post* 6 July 1974, A10.

⁷²⁵ The priests were Darrell Rupiper and Peter Grams, both members of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate Order in St. Paul, Minnesota and they worked with Dom Helder. “2 American Priests Arrested in Brazil,” *Washington Post* 19 December 1968, A23.

South to the Northeast, especially to Fortaleza and Recife.⁷²⁶ He said that the disappearances, kidnappings and imprisonments – especially amongst urban workers and students – were multiplying, and that even the laws of AI-5 were not being followed. Families of the disappeared went on pilgrimages to the various police and military locations, often not locating their arrested sons, daughters, husbands or wives. “O pressuposto é de que se trata de terroristas e de que estes não merecem a mais leve consideração.” In a 1970 speech in Paris at the Palais des Sports, Dom Helder described the torture of priests in Brazil, including graphic descriptions of electric shock and other abuses.⁷²⁷

As Dom Helder’s protests grew stronger, the military leaders also attempted to censor his voice, allegedly forbidding him access to the media and labeling him a subversive.⁷²⁸ The military raided his living quarters and offices on a regular basis, searching for communist materials, and also censored his sermons.⁷²⁹ While on the one hand, Dom Helder was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970, on the other hand, articles that claimed he was a “red” bishop appeared in U.S. media, depicting Dom Helder as more of a “fanatic” and a threat to democracy than as a legitimate voice denouncing the human rights abuses. For instance, the governor of São Paulo called him a “Fidel Castro in a cassock” and accused Dom Helder of accepting money

⁷²⁶ Helder Camara, “Aos prezados Irmãos no Episcopado e ao querido Povo de Deus da Arquidiocese de Olinda e Recife,” A1, 4 (3) – 32. Letter. Recife. 1 May 1972. CEDEM (Centro de documentação e memória da UNESP) Archive. São Paulo.

⁷²⁷ Joseph Page, “The Little Priest Who Stands Up To Brazil’s Generals,” *New York Times* 23 May 1971, SM26.

⁷²⁸ Walter Arnold, “Revolution Through Peace,” *New York Times* 22 August 1971, BR6.

⁷²⁹ Bruce Handler, “Brazil Probing 1969 Slaying of Liberal Priest,” *Washington Post* 6 July 1974, A10.

from Communist sources.⁷³⁰ This campaign of defamation appears to have been quite systematic: testifying before the US Congress in 1974, American Methodist minister Fred Morris graphically described being tortured by the military in Recife, and claimed that his captors wanted him to denounce Dom Helder as having ties with the Brazilian Communist Party.⁷³¹ The case of Dom Helder illustrates the degree of repression present in Northeastern Brazil during the dictatorship. Yet, his position as the Archbishop of Olinda and Recife, with a strong international voice, possibly gave him a small measure of impunity; the military may have felt certain limits to the degree of repression they could exert on him personally.

Milagres of the Dictatorship

In 1967, Severino Barbosa published reports on Northeastern Brazil, emphasizing the new modernity and progress of the region while connecting this “miracle” to historical messianic figures such as Padre Cícero and Euclides da Cunha. Images depicted sertanejos on horseback, suggesting that the military government allows them to peacefully maintain their traditions (of being poor and riding on horseback) within the modern nation, with the caption: “o que impressiona são os contrastes, o choque entre os velhos costumes e o modernismo de hoje. Montada a cavalo, a

⁷³⁰ Joseph Page, “The Little Priest Who Stands Up To Brazil’s Generals,” *New York Times* 23 May 1971, SM26.

⁷³¹ “Tortured in Brazil, U.S. Missionary Says,” *Washington Post* 12 December 1974, A31.

sertaneja revive a tradição nordestina.”⁷³² The story opened with the claim that “for the first time in 400 years, the caatingas nordestinas appear painted in green and in the faces of the cowhands, of peasants and women of the povo that walk in the street, a sign of tranquility and happiness.”⁷³³ Barbosa stated that the tragedy of drought will never again be a part of life in the Northeast: The new modern irrigation, dams, and water systems have brought progress to the “underdeveloped area.” The past of violence, death and the cangaço will never repeat itself. The article suggests that even with the progress and modernity, the traditional culture will persist in the Northeast, unchanged from centuries past.

Barbosa praised Padre Cícero in these reports. He claimed that “while the Devil used to roam the caatingas of the sertão, the progress initiated by Padre Cícero has changed the path of the Northeast.”⁷³⁴ A separate article emphasized certain aspects of the prophecies of the “Messiah of the Northeast” (Padre Cicero), quoting Cícero as having declared that only those who respect, love and obey the government will see the benefits of progress.⁷³⁵ The article emphasized Padre Cícero’s views about family, repeating throughout the ideas of “family decency, conjugal unions, and children respecting their parents.” The path to salvation, according to the article’s interpretation of Padre Cícero’s sermons, was through honor and obedience: being a

⁷³² Severino Barbosa, “Não é mais de secas e nem tragédias o sertão de agora,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 10 December 1967, 10.

⁷³³ Ibid.

⁷³⁴ Severino Barbosa, “Como fez o milagre da água germinar na caatinga vazia a semente boa do progresso,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 10 December 1967, 10.

⁷³⁵ Severino Barbosa, “Profecias mudaram Padre Cícero no Nostradamus do Sertão,” *Diario de Pernambuco* 24 December 1967, 9.

good son, a good father, a good daughter, a good wife and a good mother.⁷³⁶

Barbosa also spoke in a language of “miracles,” which he attributed to Euclides da Cunha, not Antonio Conselheiro. According to Barbosa, the “miracle dreamed up by Euclides da Cunha” had turned into a reality: “Sobre o solo que as amarilis atapetam, resurge triunfalmente a flora tropical.”⁷³⁷ The new projects had led to a higher rate of agricultural production, “germinating the good seed of progress.” The miracle of water supposedly proved that “Deus também é Nordeste.”⁷³⁸ Barbosa described what this progress has meant for the Nordeste, who “no longer needs to fear the past.”⁷³⁹

Nas estradas, quando passa um vaqueiro tocando o seu gado, nota-se nele, de ar desempenado e gibão desafiador, um sintoma de confiança no futuro, e há no seu rosto um sorriso de despreocupação. Mulheres idosas, ou ainda jovens, como nas cidades de ontem, seguem a cavalo para sítios e fazendas. Meninos, de livros na mão, seguem para as escolas. Sertão de hoje não tem mais secas e nem tragédias. Deus ouviu a prece dos sertanejos e mandou São Pedro jogar água no sertão. The development narrative was a part of the reason why the Brazilian military regime was able to maintain its legitimacy to rule, so it is not surprising to see the “selling” of this idea regarding the promises to modernize the Northeast. What is remarkable is the language of “milagres” and how such ideas were translated to the Northeastern context. The subtext of the story suggests that God is on the side of the dictatorship, since He has finally become Nordeste and blessed the cursed land with water and agricultural production. The references to Euclides da Cunha – notably not Antonio

⁷³⁶ Severino Barbosa, “Profecias mudaram Padre Cícero no Nostradamus do Sertão,” *Diário de Pernambuco* 24 December 1967, 9.

⁷³⁷ Severino Barbosa, “Não é mais de secas e nem tragédias o sertão de agora,” *Diário de Pernambuco* 10 December 1967, 10.

⁷³⁸ Severino Barbosa, “Como fez o milagre da água germinar na caatinga vazia a semente boa do progresso,” *Diário de Pernambuco* 10 December 1967, 10.

⁷³⁹ Ibid.

Conselheiro – and Padre Cicero also illustrate how certain historical narratives were appropriated by the dictatorship or at least were a part of the popular discourse touched upon by journalists. The use of such figures and their prophecies promoted the military government's ability to fulfill such prophecies, spreading happiness and “progress” to even the most underdeveloped and forsaken places in Brazil. At the same time, as the quoted prophecy suggests, those who refuse to obey and respect the patriarchal system will not see progress.⁷⁴⁰

O sertão vai virar mar e o mar virar sertão

In April 1968, a newly constructed dam on the Vaza-Barris River flooded the area of Cocorobó. The dam, a DNOCs project originally conceived by Getúlio Vargas in the 1950s finally came to fruition, covering the ruins of the Canudos church, two cemeteries, and remnants of the battlefield with water in less than three days. The project sought to provide irrigation for the area, and facilitate new agricultural production. Thus, the miracle of the dictatorship fulfilled the well-known prophecy by bringing water and agricultural production to the sertão.

The ruins of the Canudos church surfaces periodically when the water level drops. The entire situation is almost too poetic; in fact, scholars, artists, photographers and filmmakers have painted numerous versions of the story and

⁷⁴⁰ This idea correlates to Regina Reyes Novaes's conclusion in which she claims that the Ligas had “demonified” the latifúndio in the early 1960s, referring to it as the “besta fera.” After the coup, the displaced rural workers became known as the “Rabo da Besta” (Tail of the Beast), illustrating the change in power relations and in the popular use of certain terms. Novaes, *De Corpo e Alma*, 209-212.

discussed its significance in terms of everything from the “death” of the Left to the dispute between memory and history.⁷⁴¹ The “hard-liners” of the military dictatorship, in line with their promise to bring modernity and progress to the Northeast, constructed an irrigation project in the Bahian sertão. And, in doing so, they erased a history of backwardness, fanaticism, and rebellion as well as the military’s own questionable role in what is commonly understood as a massacre of the oppressed by the Brazilian Armed Forces. But if the military government’s plan had been to “disappear” the memory of regional resistance with this show of progress and modernity, it failed. In what seems to be an almost too perfect example of Michel Foucault’s interpretation of power and resistance – “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power,”⁷⁴² – the dam perpetuated the memory of Canudos and provided a powerful metaphor of resistance against the dictatorship.

In a letter from Francisco Julião published in a Montevideo magazine in 1970, he called for a broad front against the military dictatorship, referencing Canudos. He described the military dictatorship as a “paso ‘atrás’ al estilo de los yagunzos de que habla Euclides da Cunha.”⁷⁴³ In the early 1970s, Julião continued to talk about the need for enfranchisement, agrarian reform and resistance against the dictatorship, but was criticized by another author writing in *MARCHA* for not having a realistic vision of the political situation in the Northeast. And, in the criticism, the author likened

⁷⁴¹ For instance, Flávio Candido, *A terceira morte de Joaquim Bolívar* (2000); Eliane Caffé, *Narradores de Javé* (2003); Ipojuca Pontes, *Canudos* (1978).

⁷⁴² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 95.

⁷⁴³ Francisco Julião, “Brasil, amplia alianza o callejón sem saída,” *MARCHA* (Montevideo, Uruguay) 11 November 1970. A1, 4 (3) -38). CEDEM - Centro de documentação e memória da UNESP Archive. São Paulo.

Julião to Antonio Conselheiro: “Desde su tipo física, perfectamente identificado com las figures subdesarrollados de los nordestinos, pasando por su apariencia de místico que recuerda a la población del nordeste rural los beatos e fanáticos legendários caraterísticos de la región.”⁷⁴⁴ Power and resistance form the discourse of Northeastern Brazil to the point where this struggle has become a defining and perhaps dominant narrative of the region, as I discuss in the next chapter on memories and histories of the Ligas Camponesas from 1978-1985.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Lírio Ferreira’s *Árido Movie* (2004) is best understood within recent scholarship on Northeastern Brazil such as Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Júnior’s *A invenção do Nordeste*.⁷⁴⁵ It is a film – that like the scholarship – that seeks to challenge the very

⁷⁴⁴ Paulo Shilling, “El Suicidio politico de Julião,” *MARCHA* (Montevideo, Uruguay) 24 July 1970. A1, 4 (3) – 41. CEDEM - Centro de documentação e memória da UNESP Archive. São Paulo.

⁷⁴⁵ See also, Frederico de Castro Neves, *Imagens do nordeste: A construção da memória regional* (Fortaleza: Artes Gráficas, 1994); Laércio Souto Maior, *São os nordestinos uma minoria racial?* (Londrina: -----1985); Maura Penna, *O que faz ser nordestino: Identidades sociais, interesses e o “escândolo” Erundina* (São Paulo: Cortez, 1992)

notion of *o Nordeste*. *Árido Movie* tells the story of a TV reporter returning to Pernambuco from São Paulo to attend his father's funeral in the sertão, with vignettes about the people he encounters while in Pernambuco. What is brilliant about the film is precisely what many reviews of the film failed to grasp – the metanarrative. Throughout *Árido Movie*, Ferreira presents the audience with a “typical” Nordestino scene, and develops the scene, imbuing the image with a meaning that contradicts the traditional representation. For instance, the traditionally costumed matriarch of the sertão holds a wake for her murdered son in a town of the sertão that immediately identifies the scene as being the traditional Northeast. But, *she* – not her sons – is in control of the finances and the family business, and the family is not growing cotton or raising cattle – she is dealing marijuana. The bearded mystic performs rituals with holy water, but Ferreira reveals his incantations to hold power only because of the interest in this mysticism among urban Paulista artists and intellectuals. The southerners need the existence of a mystic, impoverished Northeast as a counterpoint for their own success in terms of cultural production and material wealth.

To understand Ferreira's point in *Árido Movie*, it helps to consider how his first film, *Baile Perfumado*, also addressed the issue of representations of the Northeast. Through the story of Lampião, Maria Bonita and the filmmaker Benjamin Abraão who shot footage of Lampião in the 1930s, Ferreira uses metanarrative to demonstrate how cultural production created the “reality” of Lampião, an essential figure of Nordestino identity. Both of Ferreira's films suggest that rural Nordestinos, mystics, and cangaceiros play an active role not only in creating their image, but also in manipulating the image to suit their own purpose. Although unequal power

relations exist between the rural Northeast and the urban South, in Ferreira's films, none of the Nordestinos are depicted as the static figures seen in the Cinema Novo films. And, to a certain extent, the Nordestinos in Ferreira's films seem to know exactly what they are doing and how they are manipulating the rest of Brazil to believe certain myths about the Northeast. Yet, none of the film reviews have touched upon this theme. This absence in the reviews exemplifies the difficulty in appropriating and challenging traditional representations of the Northeast, and in questioning the naturalized assumptions about the region and its people. The public still wants the violent and lawless Northeast, where cangaceiros and religious fanatics roam the dry sertão, where weathered faces of rural workers speak in a "quaint" rural dialect, reciting literatura de cordel and trekking with a burro to the weekly market to barter farinha, beans and charque. While many "good" or even "great" films about the Northeast have been released in the past few years, Lício Ferreira's films are masterful because they attack *o Nordeste* by unpacking it as a representation in Brazilian popular culture.

My dissertation took on a similar project as Ferreira's films or Albuquerque's cultural history in questioning the naturalized identity attached to the Northeast and its people, albeit with a different strategy. Instead of engaging only in the cultural realm, I chose to focus on a period in which diverse political, social, and cultural actors tried to challenge the Northeast's traditional power structures and cultural representations. Recent studies on rural social movements and peasant rebellions have attempted to show how elite and popular discourses about peasant and agrarian movements are mutually constitutive and constantly reshaping one another. While

these studies often focus on the State and subaltern groups, in the case of Northeastern Brazil during the Cold War, the State is but one social actor involved in greater struggles for power. My dissertation contributes to the “new” political and cultural history, by showing how the Ligas, the PCB, the Church, journalists and intellectuals, documentary and revolutionary filmmakers, popular poets, and politicians all used the historical symbols of the Northeast to gain support for their political projects. The meanings these groups attached to the symbols varied widely. But, the question remains as to whether is possible to do away with these symbols. Could a rural social movement introduce “new” symbols and narratives that had no previous association with the Northeast? Could the Northeast be the Northeast without cangaceiros and fanatics, poverty and backwardness, legacies of slavery and exploitation?

While I do not believe that it is possible for the Northeast to be the Northeast without such symbols, the meanings of the symbols can change and can be used to denounce regional inequalities and injustices. In other words, unlike Albuquerque whose premise is “not to defend the *Nordeste*, but to attack it” since the very idea of Northeastern Brazil only reproduces inequalities, I believe that by expanding an examination of the construction of *o Nordeste* beyond elite sources, we see how the idea of *o Nordeste* was not necessarily elitist nor disempowering for rural people. In the context of the 1950s and 1960s in Northeastern Brazil, social movement leaders realized that their most powerful strategy was to infuse the legends and historical symbols of the Northeast with new, revolutionary meanings. By appropriating these symbols, the movements could generate popular support for the struggle for land, or

metaphorically, the struggle for power in the region and nation. Yet at the same time, the borrowed language of the past had its limitations, since it could be easily converted and translated into the dominant meanings that designated rural Nordestinos as violent, backwards, barbaric and even less than human.

My dissertation also is also based on the premise that identity is something that is constantly changing and never fixed, even in a place like Northeastern Brazil in which history and memory seem to have frozen the region in time. The impossibility of escaping its history is the thread that holds the Northeast together as a region, and is still commonly used to describe *o Nordeste* and distinguish it from other regions in Brazil and in the “modern” world.⁷⁴⁶ Yet, if we accept the idea that identity is never fixed, is not something “essential” or natural, then it is possible to understand that the claim to a “never-changing” identity is in fact a construction, a powerful assumption about the region. My work shows how and why such assumptions enjoy legitimacy in Brazil. By examining the attempts to appropriate the meanings of the regional historical symbols, and thus attempting to change the foundations of Northeastern identity, I also “attack” the idea of *o Nordeste*. But, unlike Albuquerque, I see its persistence as the result of a much more diversified negotiation and struggle instead of top-down manipulation. This difference also

⁷⁴⁶ A poignant and odd example from a recent article in the BBC described the Brennands’ recent construction of a European castle in Recife. According to the article, the bizarre construction – complete with a moat and filled with medieval European weapons, paintings, and armor – is a reflection of the Northeastern “way” of holding on to the past. As the article observed, “Memories still die hard in northeastern Brazil and some of them - despite the splendid efforts of the Brennand family - are tinged with a touch of unhappiness.” What past, you might ask? The article is referring to the historical legacy of the Dutch occupation of Pernambuco for 25 years in the seventeenth century. Hugh O’Shaughnessy, “Dutch courage in Brazil,” *BBC News, Brazil*, 2 June 2007.

stems from examining this process of identity negotiation during a specific period in which the battles were particularly intense.

By the early 1960s, Northeastern Brazil had acquired a national and international position as a battleground for Cold War politics. From 1959 to 1964, the expansion of rural social activism in the Northeast was frequently compared to the Cuban Revolution. Revolutionary filmmakers selected the region as their focus for films exploring the non-exotic misery of the Third World, and U.S. government officials started policies and aid projects based on the assumption that “underdeveloped” regions were the most likely place to face the Communist threat. This situation not only heightened debates over regional identity, but it also produced a dearth of sources to examine the question of regional identity.

My dissertation contributes to Cold War historiography by privileging the Third World as the center of the story and the U.S. and Soviet Union as the periphery to show how and why impoverished regions such as Northeastern Brazil explain a less-examined story about struggles for power.⁷⁴⁷ The international presence in Northeastern Brazil and Northeastern social and cultural movements engagement with “Third World” struggles exemplifies the transnational component to any Cold War study. While rural social movements appropriated symbols traditionally associated with Northeastern identity, the meanings attached to these symbols often reflect broader political and cultural struggles of the Cold War. For instance, the

⁷⁴⁷ Recent historiographical contributions include Greg Grandin’s *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) and Gilbert Joseph and Daneila Spenser, eds, *In From the Cold: Latin America’s New Encounter with the Cold War* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

backlands bandit was designated the “father” of Brazilian agrarian reform while at the same time being compared to a Cuban guerrilla. Delmiro Gouveia turned into a Northeastern and Brazilian hero of modernity, but narratives of Gouveia describe how easily notions of scientific racism, modernization theory and dependency theory could be conflated during the Cold War. The possibility that “modernity” could emanate from the “backwards” and “traditional” sertão shows how Third World liberation discourse accepted modernization as a solution, but rejected modernity as being something associated with the US or Europe.

The methodological contributions of my dissertation include the sources I have used to tell this story about the political and cultural struggles to “fix” identity. As a Cold War history, the story would not be complete without U.S. archival research because the story of Northeastern Brazil was not isolated but a part of broader Cold War battles. Popular culture – and specifically film – also must enter into a story about representational struggles because Third World filmmakers turned the Northeast into a key site of Third World poverty and revolutionary potential in the late 1950s and 1960s. According to Cinema Novo filmmakers, film – as an elite and foreign-dominated medium – had to be appropriated by Third World filmmakers, who would discover a new aesthetic and language to narrate the story of the Third World. Film was seen as a medium not of mass culture but of popular culture: a way to engage with the “authentic” culture of the people and instigate revolutionary action and critical thought, instead of Hollywood’s mass culture that manipulated Third World audiences into believing their position of inferiority in the world. But, these “authentic” and “revolutionary” depictions of the Third World also relied on

traditional stereotypes and representations of the Northeast, legitimizing the key historical symbols through the cinematographic reality effect.

I chose to use an intertextual methodology to contextualize the meanings of the representations in popular culture. To consider how these cinematic narratives shaped Northeastern identity, I explored how social movements, politicians, intellectuals and journalists used the key symbols of regional identity – *cangaceiros*, religious fanaticism, slavery and abolition, and poverty and modernization – to speak about political projects such as agrarian reform and developmentalism. In the same vein as Gayatri Spivak’s seminal work on subaltern studies, I have assumed it is impossible to locate an “authentic” subaltern voice.⁷⁴⁸ Even by reading elite sources “against the grain,” analyzing popular culture productions, and conducting oral history interviews with participants, it is still impossible to tell *the* story of the rural social movements exclusively from the perspective of the participants. The history of rural struggles in Northeastern Brazil must be understood as a process, as a struggle over power amongst a number of social actors, and as influenced by the diversity of experiences of *Nordestinos*. My contribution to this topic was to frame these struggles in terms of how a variety of social actors used narratives, histories, and memories to gain popular support among the Northeastern population.

⁷⁴⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak’s point is not that oppressed groups cannot speak, but she questions if the subaltern can ever be represented and understood. For instance, she argues that it is “impossible for contemporary French intellectuals to imagine the kind of Power and Desire that would inhabit the unnamed subject of the Other of Europe.” As intellectuals, they are caught, perhaps trapped, in debates that involve the production of the Other making it impossible to locate an “authentic” subaltern identity. Furthermore, Spivak challenges the very notion of a singular “Subaltern” voice, pointing to the diversity of voices within the so-called subaltern class.

As will be seen in the epilogue, I use oral history as a source reflective of the time period in which it was produced. I believe that the politics of the Cold War, and the experience of the dictatorship, make it impossible to treat oral histories recorded in the late 1970s and early 1980s to be read as accurate accounts of the 1950s and 1960s. While the oral histories provide at times a more in-depth and personal reflection on certain instances of activism in the 1950s and 1960s, they must be analyzed through the prism of memory. But, I find that the real treasure within these sources is that they explain how individuals dealt with and experienced the coup and dictatorship, and how their memories also reflect the political and cultural struggles of the *abertura*. A study of the Northeast during the dictatorship falls outside of the scope of my dissertation. But, through the personal accounts of the same actors who return to the Northeast in the early 1980s during the *abertura*, it is possible to see how social movement leaders chose to reconcile and engage with Northeastern politics when they were finally allowed to return to public life. The multiple experiences of these individuals during the dictatorship informed their re-engagement with politics in the 1980s. These accounts illustrate from a personal perspective the effects of the dictatorship, the politics of the *abertura*, and the ways these leaders' experiences influenced their memory of pre-1964 social movements.

The Northeast will continue to be defined by its history and symbols, perhaps until a time in which material inequalities improve and the Northeast is no longer equated with the backwards, traditional, non-modern Other in Brazil. Even if such a drastic change in material and power relations should occur, the symbols could continue to represent the Northeast, albeit with drastically different meanings

attached to them. The reasons for the existence of *o Nordeste* still remain: the need to resist and to survive conditions created by material and social inequalities. The tools available are the symbols of the Northeast, which have not only been turned into sites of resistance for rural social movements, but also sites of economic gain in terms of tourism.

The problem with ending the story with the dictatorship is that such an ending reinforces the dominant narrative of the Northeast: short-lived subaltern struggles doomed to end in tragic repression by the State, resulting in little or no change for the Northeast or its people. Jango's promise of an agrarian reform law on 13 March 1964 (reformas de base) has often been seen as the action that led to the coup two weeks later. But, far less is known about the reforms and projects instituted throughout the dictatorship. On 30 November 1964, the first military president, Castello Branco, passed the Estatuto da Terra, lei 4.504 with the goal to change the agrarian structure in Brazil. In August 1966, GERAN (Grupo Especial para a Racionalização da Agro-Indústria Açucareira no Nordeste) was formed to find a solution to the problem of monocultural cane production in the Northeast. GERAN was supposed to expropriate cane lands for the cultivation of foodstuffs and move toward new labor relations in the countryside in the Northeast. But GERAN ceased to exist in 1971, in part because of landowners' vehement objection to any type of agrarian reform. Another state-sponsored project was PROALCOOL (Programa Nacional do Álcool), decreed in 1975 to fund cane production and industrialization for ethanol. And, with the return to democracy in 1985, the PNRA (Plano Nacional de Reforma Agrária) was

established along with constitutional reforms in 1988 focused on prioritizing agrarian reform.

Likewise, even though the Ligas and the PCB rural unions ceased to exist, the Church continued to organize rural workers and programs for extending rights to rural workers; for instance, with the establishment of the ACR (Associação de Cristãos no Meio Rural) in 1965, and the CPT (Comissão Pastoral da Terra) in 1976. FETAPE (Federação dos Trabalhadores Rurais de Pernambuco) affiliated with CONTAG, also organized agrarian workers, with the largest rural strike during the dictatorship occurring at the end of 1970. By the end of the dictatorship and into the 1990s, a number of rural social movements emerged to occupy land and continue direct action for the redistribution of land. In Pernambuco, in addition to the regional branch of the MST (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra), this includes the MT (Movimento dos Trabalhadores) which formed the MST-PE in 1994 (not related to the national MST movement) and in 1996, this movement transformed into the MLST (Movimento de Liberação dos Sem Terra). The MCL (Movimento de Comissões e Lutas) which is also known as “Tiradentes” emerged from the MER (Movimento de Evangelização Rural da Igreja Católica). Even though many of these rural social movements never received the amount of national and even less international attention that the Ligas generated in the 1960s, their existence counters the tragic narrative.

To further examine the ways in which the Ligas and the rural social movements of the 1950s and 1960s have been remembered or turned into a chapter of regional history, I examine a number of oral histories recorded in the late 1970s and

early 1980s in the Epilogue. While many of the actors were exiled, imprisoned or silenced during the dictatorship, they returned to public life during the abertura. By ending the story with a story of how the history of the Ligas was narrated and mobilized as a social, political and cultural site of resistance in the late 1970s and early 80s, it is possible to see how the politics of the abertura entered into the memory of rural social activism.

Chapter 8: Epilogue: Re-membering the Ligas Camponesas in the Transition to Democracy, 1978-1985

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it “the way it really was” (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.

Walter Benjamin

“Theses on the Philosophy of History”⁷⁴⁹

⁷⁴⁹ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 255.

Para concluir (...), posso repetir a frase de Francisco Oliveira, economista, que foi um dos braços direitos de Celso Furtado, aqui na Sudene: ‘O Brasil hoje está nordestinizado.’ Isso já diz tudo.

Francisco Julião, in an interview in 1983, conducted by Eliane Moury Fernandes, Fundação Joaquim Nabuco⁷⁵⁰

The struggle for agrarian reform, rural citizens’ rights, and regional/national identity went through a drastic transformation during the dictatorship. While appropriating regional symbols had once seemed revolutionary, the experience of repression, exile, armed struggle and intensified programs for agricultural industrialization transformed the political reality. The global context had also shifted tremendously: By the late 1970s, Cuba, Che Guevara and the hope of an “independent” Latin America or Third World no longer held a prominent position in global politics. The Northeast could not be seen as the place for the revolutionary Brazilian nation to emerge. But, the Northeast remained a place of resistance in the late 1970s and early 1980s because of the political and cultural activism of the 1950s and 1960s.

The Brazilian military dictatorship entered the phase known as the *abertura* in 1979, inaugurating a political “opening” that would mean an easing of repressive policies, increased civil rights and a return from exile for many political refugees. While studies have analyzed the political significance of the *abertura* in relation to labor and social movements that emerged in the late 1970s, the *abertura* was also a time in which the memory of the *Ligas Camponesas* and the other rural social

⁷⁵⁰ “Entrevista: Francisco Julião,” *Vencedores e vencidos: O movimento de 1964 em Pernambuco*, eds. Manuel Correia de Andrade and Eliane Moury Fernandes (Recife: Fundação Joaquim Nabuco, Editora Massangana, 2004), 112.

movements of the 1950s and 1960s suddenly resurfaced on the national political agenda. During this time, researchers associated with the Fundação Getúlio Vargas (Rio) and the Fundação Joaquim Nabuco de Pesquisas Sociais (Recife) initiated major research projects that involved collecting the oral histories of political actors from the 1960s. Many of the major figures – Francisco Julião, Gregório Bezerra, and Miguel Arraes – returned to Brazil from exile and began new political careers. Filmmaker Eduardo Coutinho returned to the Engenho Galiléia with some of the original footage of a documentary about the Ligas Camponesas that had been abruptly halted in 1964, to produce a now famous documentary, *Cabra marcado para morrer* (Twenty Years Later, 1983). A number of the social movement leaders – Padre Alípio de Freitas, Paulo Cavalcanti, Gregório Bezerra – published memoirs of their personal and political histories. And, scholars also started researching and publishing books on the history of the Ligas Camponesas and the struggle for land in the 1960s.

This chapter examines the process of how the history of the Ligas and the struggle for agrarian reform was re-membered and incorporated into the narrative of Northeastern Brazil. The point of this chapter is to show how certain elements of regional identity remained and others emerged, demonstrating the fluidity of regional identity in a region that has been depicted as remaining static and tied to its past. For instance, the metaphor of the family emerged during the abertura as a symbol of Nordeste identity, a symbol that had not been prominent in the 1960s. The family had been one of the main discourses of the military regime, and many Leftist politicians and ex-social movement leaders appropriated the symbol of the family to challenge the legitimacy of the dictatorship, depicting the family as “broken” or

dismembered. This “new” symbol of Nordeste identity turned into a political demand for a return to democracy that critiqued the legitimacy of the military dictatorship.

At the same time, the era also solidified – or, following Pierre Nora’s argument, turned into “history” – certain ideas about the Ligas and the rural social movements. Similar to the previous chapters, this chapter takes a multilayered approach to the dialectic of history, analyzing how debates over the past shaped present politics and identities, but it should be stressed that the *abertura* was a drastically different era than the 1950s and 1960s, and the sources for this chapter are different than the sources used in the preceding chapters. I chose to interpret these sources in the conclusion – instead of analyzing them in the previous chapters alongside the sources produced in the 1950s and 1960s – since the late 1970s and early 1980s was the tragic starting point for many of the studies that wrote the Ligas into history.

To understand why the Ligas have been so commonly referred to as a failure and a tragedy, it is necessary to describe the reasons and motives for this perception. To create a strong narrative of opposition against the dictatorship, political leaders and filmmakers created tragic yet heroic narratives. To be clear, I am not doubting that exile, torture, imprisonment and death constitute a tragic ending. What I am saying is that the story of the Ligas re-emerged as the main evidence that the dictatorship had failed on multiple levels, suddenly being transformed into a prevalent if not dominant narrative in the early 1980s. And this interpretation both conformed in many ways to a more traditional narrative of Northeastern Brazil (a region in which

short-lived subaltern struggles are violently oppressed by the state resulting in little material change for the majority of people), and impeded a historical interpretation that showed the real gains made by the Ligas and the social movements of the 1950s and 1960s; namely, placing agrarian reform and the social welfare of Nordestinos on the national political agenda.

The tragic narrative also reinforced certain entrenched stereotypes of rural Nordestinos. Similar to Euclides da Cunha's *Os sertões*, the narrative of the Ligas in the 1980s depicted Nordestinos as brave creatures who persevered through hardship, but who persisted to lack political consciousness and an ability to fight against state oppression, condemned to a short, miserable existence as perpetual victims of a state who refused to incorporate them as equal national citizens. Even the alleged "Nordestino experience" of torture and imprisonment depicted Nordestinos as "different" than Brazilians; for instance, in one interview with Julião, the *Pasquim* reporter characterized Nordestinos as silent sufferers. The reporter claimed, "What is interesting is the marked difference of the narratives of imprisonment and torture between the people from the Northeast and the people from the South. Those from the South tell their stories with a richness of detail, almost enduring, while the Nordestinos have difficulty telling their stories, they are ashamed of being imprisoned or tortured. For the Nordesteño to tell that they were caught, it is almost impossible."⁷⁵¹ This observation exemplifies the ways in which certain conceptions of Nordesteño identity continued to distinguish the "Nordestino" from other Brazilians, slipping without comment into the media, without needing further

⁷⁵¹ The interview in *O Pasquim*, reprinted in Carlito Lima, *Confissões de um capitão: memórias* (Rio de Janeiro: Garamond, 2001), 104-105.

explanation. In other words, such an overstated characterization did not provoke questions because of the well-established idea of Nordestinos as perpetual victims, whose life and identity is marked by the notion of silent suffering. This brings to mind the quote by Miguel Arraes, cited in Chapter Two, in which he described suffering as a central characteristic of Nordeste identity: “Easiness is not of our world, the world of the Northeast. We are made of suffering and perseverance, learning from an early age that stubbornness is the condition of our daily life.”

The oral history interviews and life histories from the late 1970s and 1980s on the struggle for land and the military seizure of power are fascinating because of their contradictions and their political significance. Many of the subjects had been silenced until this period, in prison and/or exile – and at times, in disappearance – until the 1980s. The interviews also took place in the highly politicized environment of the abertura and the movement for a return to democracy. At the same time, the subjects actively participated in shaping and using the narrative of regional identity: suffering, exploitation and poverty, repression and resistance, as well as the perseverance of historical regional symbols. To illustrate the changes in the narratives and in the voices who were constructing the narrative, I divide the concluding chapter into three main sections. First, I analyze the stories of familiar political leaders, voices that oftentimes captured the spotlight in the 1950s and 1960s, people who were prominent social actors involved with the Ligas Camponesas, the Catholic Church, and the Brazilian Communist Party. The second section focuses on Eduardo Coutinho’s documentary *Cabra marcado para morrer* (Twenty Years Later, 1983), to show how this film helped to create the tragic narrative of the Ligas

and of rural Nordestinos. And, the final section looks at people who were involved in the social and political struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, but whose stories rose in political stature because of the historical context of the early 1980s and because of experiences of the dictatorship.

The problem of how to analyze oral history or oral traditions as “evidence” is a rich area of theoretical debate because of the nature of the source. Oral history or oral traditions is most commonly associated with non-literate people, but it has also been used to narrate histories silenced by forms of state (or other) repression. One of the central debates involves the idea of whether “truth” or “real history” can be located in oral history. On this question, I follow the arguments of Luise White and Toni Morrison. In *Speaking With Vampires*, Luise White examines the “real” historical contexts of the emergence of vampire stories in Africa in relation to colonial encounters and the “universal” understanding of the symbols of these stories; namely, the exploitation of workers.⁷⁵² Her point is that discerning the truth is not really the point-in-question in oral history research. Instead, she attempts to turn “words and stories into the tools with which a historian reconstructs the past, ...not (by)...transforming them into something else, but of giving the words and stories the

⁷⁵² Jennifer Cole describes this difference in her analysis of the ritual of cattle sacrifice practiced by the Betsimisaraka in Madagascar. “In daily life, memories of the colonial past become a bit like a subterranean brook that runs its course without anybody paying much attention, until a person stumbles upon a place where the brook wells up through the earth. But unlike an underground stream that is the product of natural forces, colonial memories are entirely a social phenomenon. They are the residue of historically constructed relationships, with tensions and contradictions that lie just beneath the more obvious order of things.” Cole’s work interrogates the idea of lived history and Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*. Jennifer Cole, *Forget Colonialism? Sacrifice and the Art of Memory in Madagascar* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 281.

play of contradiction, of leading question, of innuendo and hearsay that they have in practice.”⁷⁵³ She argues that the reason why people tell stories is to get their point across and tell others what happened, and they repeat stories that reinforce their points most effectively, regardless of “truth” or “falsity.”

Toni Morrison’s idea of “rememory” in *Beloved*, which means “showing how the symbolic re-experiencing of the past reshapes its memory,” illustrates how life experiences function in relation with a remembered past but also how experience modifies these memories.⁷⁵⁴ This is a suitable framework for studying the intersection between identities and collective memory in Northeastern Brazil because it allows for more fluid connections between the constructions of identities and symbolic histories of Nordestinos. It also provides the fluidity to analyze how the historical context and struggles for power shape people’s memories, histories, and identities.

The oral histories, films, and memoirs from the late 1970s and early 1980s also form a broader narrative of Latin American experiences during the Cold War. The Brazilian military dictatorship – similar to authoritarian regimes throughout Latin America – created a new Brazilian nation, a nation marked by guilt and anger, justifications of blatant violations of human rights and experiences of pain, imprisonments and death. The interviews, oral histories and memoirs that I analyze in this chapter show these divisions and remark upon the key question about the

⁷⁵³ Luise White, *Speaking With Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000): 33.

⁷⁵⁴ Yael Zerubavel and other scholars have used the idea of “rememory” to illustrate how certain pasts are invented and validated in the construction of identities. Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 6.

future of the Brazilian nation. Similar to the 1950s and 1960s, it was a period of change, of uncertainty, of political and cultural activism, and a period in which the Northeast once again appeared on the national political agenda. It was a time in which regional identity once again entered into a period of contestation and reformation, illustrating why this period is relevant to my study.

After locating these testimonios, oral histories and memoirs, I decided not to use them to discern a “true” history of the struggle for land in the 1960s but to interpret them as historical narratives that were part of the political process of regional identity formation in Brazil. In other words, I believe it is impossible to read the interviews without considering the historical context in which they were produced, a “hall of mirrors” composed of ten years of radical struggle in the rural Northeast, fifteen to twenty years of a repressive military dictatorship, and the (then) current political movement to end military rule and return to a democratic system. Instead of deciphering their “accuracy,”⁷⁵⁵ I show how the proverbial “hall of mirrors” affected the ways in which the subjects relate their memories of this historical period. I also believe it is important to discuss what happened during the military regime in Northeastern Brazil, using these sources to map out the experiences of the dictatorship in a region oftentimes excluded from the historiography on the dictatorship in Latin America and even specifically in Brazil.

⁷⁵⁵ Abercrombie argues that the discipline of history remains that of objectivism and the historian’s work is judged by the adequacy of his or her writing as a representation of what “actually happened,” or at least “was actually written.” Instead of engaging with the idea of “accuracy” or “objectivism,” my interpretation of these oral histories attempts to show the multiple factors that suggest why subjects chose to tell their stories the way they did. Thomas A. Abercrombie, *Pathways of Memory and Power: Ethnography and History Among an Andean People* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 409.

The personal accounts demonstrate the multiple trajectories of how prominent politicians and social movement leaders experienced the dictatorship, and how their “rememory” of the pre-1964 and post-1964 periods during the abertura helped to reshape Northeastern regional identity.

Eduardo Coutinho’s documentary *Cabra marcado para morrer* adds another layer to the analysis because it was a popular documentary that helped shape common perceptions of the history of the Ligas throughout Brazil. Scholars have studied the power of photography in creating a precise and attainable visual memory not possible in oral accounts. *Cabra marcado* combines images from 1964 with images and interviews in the 1980s, constructing a visual and sonorous narrative of the history and the memory of the Ligas Camponesas in both historic periods. The story was narrated as tragedy, providing a strong critique of the military regime and its detrimental effect on the rural Northeastern population. While based on actual interviews with Ligas participants and their families, Coutinho cast the story of the Ligas metaphorically as how the military dictatorship tore apart the traditional Brazilian family being torn apart, forcing them into hiding or killing them. I analyze the historical narrative portrayed in the film and its power in shaping memories of the Ligas as a form of mass culture and as a documentary.

To a certain extent, the oral histories, films and memoirs tell a “universal” story of how people make sense of a repressive regime predicated on the use of torture and murder. Many of the stories that people told about Northeastern Brazil have certain shared themes that link their experience of dictatorship to that of people in Argentina, Chile, El Salvador, etc. But, at the same time, the stories also carry a

regional or national narrative, as well as demonstrating how the regional narrative helped form people's own recounting of their personal histories and how people's memories helped shape the regional narrative. The objective of this chapter is to analyze how the regional narrative, the experience of dictatorship, the politics of the abertura, and people's subjectivities put together or re-membered the Ligas Camponesas and the struggles of the 1950s and 1960s.

A Return to Familiar Figures: the Ligas, the Church and the PCB

The abertura allowed many political exiles to return to Brazil after 15 to 20 years of living in other countries and becoming involved in other types of political struggles. Crowds gathered at the airport to welcome back heroes such as Miguel Arraes, and while such spectacles carried a signs of elation and hope of a return to democracy, the defining narrative of this period was uncertainty. The promise of a return to democracy was still precarious, and beyond this, the political and social landscape of Northeastern Brazil had changed, exiled leaders had new political platforms, political prisoners' experiences of torture, imprisonment and death influenced their views on the military, and leaders who had remained involved in legal rural social movements, namely the Catholic Church, had to confront the compromises and resistance they had experienced in Northeastern Brazil throughout the dictatorship. It is, in fact, hard to imagine such a reunion. In addition to the changes, the absence also solidified certain memories of the 1950s and 1960s. People expected the exiled politicians to hold similar beliefs as before the coup, and leaders also imagined Nordestinos as who they were before the coup. During this unsettled period of reunion, the main point of

agreement among the social movement leaders from the 1950s and 1960s was the need for a return to democracy. And while this was the overarching goal, the interviews also reflect how these social movement leaders were actively trying to carve out a space for themselves and their political projects in the context of the abertura. Their memories describe their experiences during the dictatorship and outline their political platform during the abertura. This section starts by discussing the interviews of three leaders of the Ligas Camponesas with drastically different experiences of the dictatorship. Then, I describe the stories of two of the Church leaders who played a prominent role in organizing the Catholic Federations in the 1960s. The final part of this section examines the interviews of two prominent leaders of the PCB rural syndicates.

Ligas Camponesas

Um oficial notou-me a barba crescida e perguntou:

- Barba à Fidel?

- Falta de gilete, capitão.

- A conversation between a soldier and Francisco Julião as remembered in *Até quarta, Isabela!*, a book he wrote to one of his daughters while in prison⁷⁵⁶

⁷⁵⁶ Francisco Julião, *Até quarta, Isabela!* (Rio: Editora Civilização Brasileira, 1966), 66.

Francisco Julião had been a radical leader in the 1950s and 1960s in Pernambuco because of his involvement with the Ligas Camponesas and his unprecedented initiative in organizing a social movement to fight for rights – the right to vote, the right to have labor laws extended to the countryside, and the right to own land. But, the coup of 1964 led to a dramatic recasting of the Ligas, of Francisco Julião, and of leftist movements in Brazil. As the above quote suggests, a revolutionary discourse of the *barbudos* switched to the reality of a repressive regime in 1964. Although Julião was depicted and associated with the Cuban Revolution, the idea of Julião, the Ligas, and the Cuban Revolution acquired a new meaning during the dictatorship. As Julião suggested in his memoir, after the coup, a beard no longer symbolized revolutionary hope for him; instead, it was a symbol of the military's power over Brazilian's rights and bodies.⁷⁵⁷ In this section, I analyze two interviews with Francisco Julião (1977 and 1983), the memoir written by Padre Alípio de Freitas (1981), and an interview conducted with Assis Lemos, leader of the Ligas in Paraíba.⁷⁵⁸ While the format of a publication versus an oral interview must be taken into consideration as to the difference in the ways these Ligas leaders depicted

⁷⁵⁷ Julião later described the torture he experienced while in prison in Recife, and the reason why he wrote the letter to his daughter. “Na II Companhia de Guardas, fui violentamente espancado por um sargento (...) sofri ameaças de ser fuzilado, de ser mandado para o paredão, soldados com metralhadoras na mão e a cela escura, diminuta, infra-humana.” Julião said he was treated well in Brasília in the Batalhão da Guarda Presidencial, and in Rio de Janeiro, he was in complete isolation in the Fortaleza de Santa Cruz, in an infested cell with “memories of the slaves put to death for having committed crimes.” “Entrevista: Francisco Julião,” 107-108.

⁷⁵⁸ Clodomir de Santos Moraes, also a Ligas leader who published books on the Ligas, could also be included in this section, although his trajectory is even more controversial than Francisco Julião's. When asked about Clodomir, most of the interviewees refused to comment. José dos Prazeres, another leader, could also be included in this section but his role is only recalled in the testimonies of the other interviewees.

themselves, perhaps more significant was the fact that Julião spent most of the years of the dictatorship in exile in Mexico, Freitas spent most of these years in prison in Brazil, and Assis Lemos remained in Brazil with his political rights banned.

In Julião's years of exile, the Northeast became a drastically different place and the controversial depictions of Julião only increased. When Julião returned to Brazil in the 1980s from exile in Cuernavaca, Mexico to Brazil, he traveled throughout Brazil to talk to groups about agrarian reform and rural people's rights. He ended up supporting a right-wing candidate instead of Miguel Arraes because Julião claimed that the right-wing candidate had a better vision of how to improve the living standard in the countryside. Some believed this showed Julião's "true" latifundiario and elitist roots. Also, many people felt betrayed or disillusioned by Julião since he supposedly had gone into exile and did not partake in resistance in Brazil. Certain perceptions – of Julião as a mystic figure similar to Antonio Conselheiro – remained in tact from the 1960s to the 1980s. For instance, PCB leader Paulo Cavalcanti described Julião as being a "Marxist-mystic" who was a mixture of Antônio Conselheiro with Lenin, and often repeated the phrase: "o sertão vai virar mar e o mar virar sertão."⁷⁵⁹

One of the key themes in interviews conducted with Julião in the late 1970s and early 1980s was Julião's insistence to have always fought for rural people's rights. He discussed at great length his connection to rural workers and peasants as a child and his interest in working as a lawyer to defend rural workers as a law student.

⁷⁵⁹ Paulo de Figueiredo Cavalcanti, depoimento. Interviewed by Eliane Moury Fernandes, Recife, 22 April 1982. (Recife: Fundação Joaquim Nabuco-CEHIBRA, 1996), 86-87.

The emphasis on always having supported rural worker and peasant interests composed Julião's political platform in the 1980s. But, the situation in Northeastern Brazil had changed. Years of a repressive military regime and the policies of agricultural modernization had shifted labor relations in the countryside.⁷⁶⁰ Julião's claim to being the first politician and lawyer who fought for rural people no longer held the same power it had in the optimistic era of the 1950s and 1960s.

Julião's experience as an exile in Mexico influenced the way that he reflected up on the Ligas Camponesas, and after 14 years in exile, he described himself in the magazine, *Siempre!*, as being "half Brazilian, half Mexican."⁷⁶¹ He said that the first years in Mexico were extremely difficult because he did not speak Spanish and as a rural lawyer in Brazil, he had a difficulty in figuring out what to do with his life in Cuernavaca. His second wife and children left him to return to Brazil because of the hardships they faced in Mexico. Due to political interests and experiences as exiles, Julião and artist David Alfaro Siqueiros became friends, and Siqueiros hosted Julião in his house and provided financial support. Julião also developed a friendship with Iván Illich, who created a course ("Consciencia Social e Ideologia Camponesa") for Julião to teach in the Centro de Documentação e Cultura in Cuernavaca. When Salvador Allende came to Cuernavaca, he met with Julião and gave Julião enough money that he could afford not to work for three months and write a book, *O cambão*. As the years of dictatorships continued to create a more significant community of

⁷⁶⁰ For detailed analysis of this, see: Anthony Pereira, *The End of the Peasantry: The Rural Labor Movement in Northeast Brazil, 1961-1988* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997).

⁷⁶¹ Cited in Diana G. Hidalgo Castellanos, "Um olhar na vida de exílio de Francisco Julião," Master's thesis, USP. (São Paulo, 2002), 7.

exiles in Cuernavaca and abroad, Julião became more involved in the Committee of Latin American Solidarity to create solidarity and resistance against the military dictatorships.⁷⁶² As Diana G. Hidalgo Castellanos argued in her study on Julião's experience as an exile, Julião became attached to the idea of portraying himself as a Latin American (rather than a Brazilian or Nordesteño) and worked politically to create a larger pan-Latin American identity of resistance.⁷⁶³

In the 1977 interview, Julião described a film in detail, which symbolized the type of identity he was trying to create for himself during the abertura. He claimed that the political interest in the Ligas was instigated by the popularity of the Marlon Brando film, *Viva Zapata!* (1952), in Recife in 1955. Supposedly, Clovis Melo, leftist journalist and newspaper editor, published a headline in the *Diário da Noite* (PE) that directly linked the film to the Ligas Camponesas.⁷⁶⁴ Because of the popularity of *Viva Zapata!*, the article helped the Ligas rise to national and international interest. Julião claimed that the headline also led to a group of large landowners, usineiros, and fornecedores to call a meeting and discuss the “problem” of Francisco Julião in 1955. In this meeting, one of Julião's ex-classmates supposedly said that Julião was not corruptible; he would not accept money to leave the Northeast and abandon the Ligas. So, the group made plans for Julião's assassination. Julião learned of these plans through a woman who he was defending in court, which led him to draw up a will in case it came to fruition, and he decided simply to wait, in what he described as a fatalistic option. But, his assassin had

⁷⁶² “Entrevista: Francisco Julião,” *Vencedores e vencidos*, 110-111.

⁷⁶³ Castellanos, “Um olhar na vida de exílio de Francisco Julião,” 83.

⁷⁶⁴ Francisco Julião, depoimento. Interviewed by Aspásia Camargo, December 1977. Yxcatepec, Morelos, Mexico. (Rio: FGV/CPDOC – História Oral, 1982), 62-63.

recently converted to Spiritism, and decided that he could not murder Julião.⁷⁶⁵ Julião claimed that when journalists and some of Julião's friends learned of the death threats and made the connection with the film, this led to a new view of the peasant as an important actor to be incorporated into the struggle for democracy in Brazil.

The fact that Julião remembered and decided to talk about *Viva Zapata!* as being the spark that initiated political interest in the Ligas in an interview in 1977 reflects his experience in exile. The idea that an (imperialist) Hollywood film instigated interest in the Ligas would have been a shocking statement in the anti-American milieu of Pernambuco in the 1950s and 1960s. Julião had been living in Morelos, Mexico for about 12 years at the time of the interview, which altered his pantheon of the heroes of agrarian reform. The reference also suggests that Julião may have identified personally with the figure of Zapata in the film. *Viva Zapata!* is not a triumphant revolutionary film; it is a story of struggle for land during the Mexican revolution, of the peasant against the landowners, the traditional elite, and the corruption of Mexican politics during the revolution. It is a story that ends in deception and defeat. But, at the same time, Zapata's death has a glimmer of hope in that he was seen as turning into a powerful symbol for agrarian reform, continuing to live in the hearts and minds of the Mexican peasant, continuing to exist "in the mountains" and ready to return if the peasants ever needed him again. While Julião tried to construct a similar storyline out of Lampião in the 1950s and 1960s, by the late 1970s, he chose Zapata as this figure. And while the myth of Zapata in *Viva Zapata!* and the myth of Lampião still roaming the sertão is similar, a few key

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid., 64-66.

differences are worthy of note. For one, the obvious difference in the different contexts. But Zapata and Lampião also are very different figures in popular memory. Pancho Villa's more controversial place in Mexican popular memory would probably be closer to Lampião in Northeastern Brazil.

This is not to say that Julião did not remember the historical roots of the Ligas and the struggle for agrarian reform in Brazil, even though they went through certain changes from the 1950s to the late 1970s. In the 1977 interview, Julião explained that José Bonifácio had been the first person to think about agrarian reform in Brazil. He stated that Bonifácio had been more authentic and more radical than Joaquim Nabuco, who had started the struggle for the peasant and against the landholding system that enslaved the peasant.⁷⁶⁶ Julião also saw the Revolution of 1930 as an important historical precedent in that Vargas initiated legal reforms for workers, granting them rights as national citizens. The developmentalist policies of Kubitschek along with the emergence of the Ligas Camponesas and other peasant movements and new means of communication also were considered crucial historical issues that led to agrarian reform becoming a national political issue.⁷⁶⁷

As for the emergence of the Ligas Camponesas, in 1977 Julião referred to the Cuban Revolution, to the policies of developmentalism, and to the idea that Northeastern Brazil became seen at this time as the diseased area that needed to be healed for national progress. Julião claimed that the influence of the Cuban

⁷⁶⁶ Julião, depoimento. (FGV/CPDOC), 120-121.

Yet, in a 1983 interview, he used the symbol of Joaquim Nabuco to describe Josué de Castro, who Julião described as one of the first leaders of agrarian reform. "Entrevista: Francisco Julião," *Vencedores e vencidos*, 69.

⁷⁶⁷ Julião, depoimento, (FGV/CPDOC), 121-122.

Revolution propelled the Ligas on to the international stage, but in retrospect, he believed the connection had not benefited the Ligas. He claimed that the Cuban Revolution led to a radicalization of the struggle for agrarian reform that was detrimental to the struggle for land.⁷⁶⁸ In a 1983 interview with Eliane Moury Fernandes, Julião became more adamant about the role of the Cuban Revolution, claiming that it had “absolutely no influence on the expansion of the Ligas Camponesas.” He said that Juscelino Kubitschek had more influence on the Ligas than Fidel Castro because of Kubitschek’s politics of developmentalism.⁷⁶⁹ This change in Julião’s perception of the role of Cuba from the 1960s to the late 1970s to the interview probably conducted in the 1980s illustrates the ways in which politics shifted Julião’s history of the Ligas. By the time of the 1983 interview, Julião was supporting developmentalist strategies for agrarian reform and sought a historical connection with government of Kubitschek. Likewise, since Julião was collaborating with large landowners in the 1980s to work for a program of agrarian reform, he claimed that when the Cuban Revolution became Leninist-Marxist, this led to a radicalization of the Brazilian Communist Party’s role in rural organizing but it hindered the Ligas because it turned all the large landowners against the Cuban Revolution and the Ligas.⁷⁷⁰

The historical roots of the Ligas themselves remained seen as connected to the regional symbols: the cangaceiro, the messianic movements, the Cabanada and other

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid., 122.

⁷⁶⁹ “Entrevista: Francisco Julião,” *Vencedores e vencidos*, 78.

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid., 78-79.

Northeastern struggles.⁷⁷¹ Julião claimed that it was no coincidence that the Ligas had emerged in the Northeast and in Pernambuco since the Northeast had a long tradition of important peasant struggles that preceded and fueled the Ligas. Julião claimed that the Ligas had been different from these past struggles in terms of their advanced organizational structure. In an exemplary story of how Northeastern historical symbols were used to gather support for the Ligas, Julião told of a march to Juazeiro do Norte on 7 September 1964. Julião believed that by leading a peasant march to pay homage to Padre Cícero, it would then be possible to gain support in the sertão. He contracted Abelardo da Hora to make a life-sized statue of Padre Cícero, that the Ligas associates would then carry to Juazeiro do Norte and install on the highest hill in the valley. Pamphlets were to be distributed that linked the romeiros to the Ligas Camponesas, which Julião felt was the most effective way of incorporating the sertanejo into the Ligas.⁷⁷² While most analyses of the Ligas claim that the movement lost momentum in the years preceding the coup because of competition with the Church and the PCB, the story of plans for incorporating the sertão into the movement demonstrate that Julião had strategies for strengthening and expanding the base of the Ligas.

Julião claimed to have reflected upon the problems of the Northeast during his time in exile, reading and studying the problems of the region.⁷⁷³ He recalled being asked about which political line he was affiliated with and instead of claiming to be with the Soviet Union, China or Cuba, he affiliated himself with the Liga of Sapé in

⁷⁷¹ Julião, depoimento. (FGV/CPDOC), 123.

⁷⁷² Ibid., 96-98.

⁷⁷³ Ibid., 103.

Paraíba, expressing his belief in regionalism and distinguishing the movement in the Northeast, linking his activism specifically to the problems of the Northeastern peasant.⁷⁷⁴ Julião consistently declared the Northeast as the region of Brazil where revolutionary change started, demonstrating his belief in regionalism.⁷⁷⁵ As he stated:

“Pernambuco é um Estado de onde sempre têm partido os movimentos mais sérios em favor da libertação do nosso povo, não somente no sentido político, mas também no sentido cultural, social. Pernambuco tem dado lições de liberdade e esperança. É um Estado pioneiro nesse campo. Considero que o movimento das Ligas Camponesas, que extrapolou as fronteiras de Pernambuco e do Nordeste, influenciou para criar uma consciência nacional a favor da Reforma Agrária.”⁷⁷⁶

He claimed that João Goulart (or nationalism) had never had a strong political presence in Northeastern Brazil because of the autonomy of Pernambuco during these years and because of the fact that Miguel Arraes had been a local leader, rising in national status, with a stronger connection to Northeastern rural and urban workers than Goulart.⁷⁷⁷ Julião saw regionalism as more significant in Rio Grande do Sul and

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid., 104.

⁷⁷⁵ Manoel Correia de Oliveira Andrade’s oral history also refers to the historical roots of Northeastern revolutions. Andrade was a professor at the University of Paraíba in 1963 and the author of numerous books about the historical and sociological conditions in Northeastern Brazil. In a 1984 interview, he claimed he was a man of the democratic left, who defended social reforms that would change the region. He was arrested on 18 April 1964 and held in prison for a few days, then placed on house arrest for two months, leaving Pernambuco for France to do a post-graduate degree. Andrade claimed that the history of Pernambuco was the history of revolutions and that “no Recife, sempre houve uma massa pronta a receber uma pregação.” His perspective on the Ligas Camponesas was that they had a “great historic importance even though they were limited by their very nature of organizing rural workers.” Manuel Correia de Oliveira Andrade, depoimento. Interviewed by Eliane Moury Fernandes. 25 June 1984. (Recife: FJNPS-CEHIBRA), p. 23, 26, 35-36.

⁷⁷⁶ “Entrevista: Francisco Julião,” *Vencedores e vencidos*, 93.

⁷⁷⁷ Julião, depoimento, (FGV/CPDOC), 143.

Pernambuco than nationalism, and he argued that this is why these states had historically always led revolutionary movements.⁷⁷⁸

Julião described the Ligas as a loosely organized movement and remembered himself as a flexible leader who used paternalism as a strategy to organize peasants. He claimed that this was because of the importance of paternalism in the Northeast. He said that paternalism was the only way that he could get close to the peasant because that was the style that they were accustomed to, but his goal was to use paternalistic techniques to communicate with the rural population.⁷⁷⁹ Once he had gained their trust, he started to push them to think for themselves and become politically conscious.⁷⁸⁰ Supposedly, peasants always wanted to give him gifts, but he always refused to accept anything, telling them to keep the food and gifts for themselves and their families. His insistence on this point probably illustrates the fact that those who opposed Julião and the Ligas had criticized Julião for “stealing” from rural Nordestinos and taking their money to strengthen his own political position.

Julião discussed how the culture of mysticism created by the Catholic Church was a tactic that he used in organizing the Ligas because it was a way to communicate with the rural population. He said that peasants associated communists with Satan, so he chose to use popular poetry and the Bible since Northeastern peasants were

⁷⁷⁸ Julião compared the two states saying that the Pernambucano is a Gaucho on foot; the Gaucho is a Pernambucano on horseback. Ibid., 144.

⁷⁷⁹ Another lawyer who worked with the Ligas Camponesas in the zona de mata, Joaquim Ferreira Filho, claimed that the Ligas were less paternalistic than the rural unions because they had less of a bureaucratic structure and were more revolutionary. Ferreira remembered the Ligas as not having the same degree of paternalism that is associated with unions in Brazil. Joaquim Ferreira Filho, depoimento. Interviewed by Eduardo Raposo, 21 June 1977 (Rio: FGV/CPDOC-História Oral, 1986.), 12-13.

⁷⁸⁰ Julião, depoimento, (FGV/CPDOC), 91.

mystics. Raised Catholic, Julião claimed to have broken with the Church when he was 18 years old, but he always respected the mysticism of the Church and saw the message of Jesus Christ as a powerful tool for organizing rural movements.⁷⁸¹ In the 1977 interview, Julião also alluded to the importance of Protestant ministers in leading the Ligas, especially in Sapé. (João Pedro Teixeira was a Protestant minister.) According to Julião, when a number of Catholic priests started to organize against the Ligas, the Protestant ministers were vital to maintaining the trust in the rural population for the Ligas. He claimed that for the peasants, the prophets of Protestantism were more relevant than Catholic Saints because the prophets had stronger ties to the struggle for land.⁷⁸²

Julião claimed in 1977 to have always been against the use of violence in the countryside. He reflected upon certain Ligas leaders who used the discourse of violence and attempted to organize guerrilla camps, but Julião was supposedly never involved in these efforts. Julião claimed his goal was to mobilize, organize and raise the political consciousness of the peasants in Brazil.⁷⁸³ In explaining his reason for this perspective on violence, he referred to the history of peasant movements in Europe and throughout Latin America, claiming that peasant rebellions had a tendency to shift toward mass violence led by mystics and anarchists. Julião claimed that Padre Alípio de Freitas followed in this tradition of mysticism, violence and anarchy.⁷⁸⁴ The next part of this section describes the published memoir of Alípio de Freitas, a leader who Julião described in 1977 as being too radical, and provoking fear

⁷⁸¹ Ibid., 155-158.

⁷⁸² Ibid., 93-94.

⁷⁸³ Ibid., 113.

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid., 114.

because of Padre Alípio's sectarianism. He recalled Alípio as making fierce public declarations about warfare without having the weapons or manpower to actually support such provocations.⁷⁸⁵ While both men emphasized their dedication to helping the rural population in their testimonies, their method of proving or legitimizing this dedication was completely different. Julião returned from exile describing his connections to Latin American intellectuals and studies of agrarian reform, while Alípio de Freitas was released from nine years of prison and described his torture and isolation as a form of resistance.

Padre Alípio de Freitas, a Catholic priest from Portugal and one of the main leaders of the Ligas in the 1960s, published his memories of his imprisonment from 1970 to 1979, *Resistir é preciso*. Freitas had returned to Brazil after a brief period of exile to partake in the guerrilla resistance movement. He was arrested in May of 1970 in Juscelino Kubitschek, a working class neighborhood (*suburbia*) of Rio de Janeiro. Upon his return to Brazil in the mid-1960s, Freitas had left the priesthood, and become a PCB militant. In the DOPS-São Paulo files on Alípio de Freitas after 1970, his profession is listed as a "university professor until 1964", with no reference made to him as a Catholic priest or ex-Catholic priest.⁷⁸⁶ He had been starting a rural resistance movement outside of Brasília when he was arrested. He was a leader of the Partido Revolucionário dos Trabalhadores (PTR), part of the Communist Party and

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid., 106.

⁷⁸⁶ Delegacia Especializada de Ordem Política – São Paulo. No. 87.691. File: Alberto Henrique Becker, Partido Revolucionário dos Trabalhadores. "Auto de Qualificação e de Interrogatório: Alípio Cristiano de Freitas," 30 November 1970. Arquivo do Estado de São Paulo. DOPS-SP.

the Ação Popular (AP).⁷⁸⁷ The DOPS report claimed that the PTR was a Marxist-Leninist movement that used violence, such as armed struggle, to move toward their goal of taking over the Brazilian government and instating a socialist regime.⁷⁸⁸ In his memoir, Alípio de Freitas claimed that his view on political violence remained the same throughout his revolutionary career in Brazil: “People have the right to fight reactionary violence with revolutionary violence.”⁷⁸⁹ He believed in revolutionary warfare, and even claimed that his torture was justified in that it served as an inspiration for others to participate in such a war.⁷⁹⁰ Upon his release, some of his *companheiros* read aloud the letter he wrote to the Archbishop in Rio, Dom Jaime de Barros Câmara in 1962 to show the history of his uncompromising pledge to struggle on behalf of the Brazilian worker.⁷⁹¹

His published memoirs mostly describe the facilities where he was imprisoned, the military and police he encountered, and the torture and interrogation he endured. His story differs greatly from that of Francisco Julião, and shows another path taken by Ligas leaders and participants: clandestine armed struggle, arrest and imprisonment. His recollections illustrate the similarities in experiences of political prisoners in Latin America during the dictatorship, stories of torture and imprisonment that are all too familiar. It is important to briefly explain his

⁷⁸⁷ Alípio de Freitas, *Resistir é preciso: Memória do tempo da morte civil do Brasil* (Rio: Editora Record, 1981), 34-35.

⁷⁸⁸ Delegacia Especializada de Ordem Política – São Paulo. No. 87.691. File: Alberto Henrique Becker, Partido Revolucionário dos Trabalhadores. “Auto de Qualificação e de Interrogatório: Alípio Cristiano de Freitas,” 30 November 1970. Arquivo do Estado de São Paulo. DOPS-SP.

⁷⁸⁹ Freitas, *Resistir é preciso*, 263.

⁷⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 263-266.

⁷⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 279.

experience in this chapter to show the multiple trajectories of Ligas leaders and to explain the differing views on the dictatorship during the abertura. Upon his arrest, Alípio de Freitas was taken to DOI-CODI (Department of Operations of Information - Center for Internal Defense Operations) in Rio de Janeiro, then to DOPS in Rio, then back to DOI-CODI where he eventually signed a testimony declaring his “illegal” activities. He was then sentenced to 24 years of prison for his illegal activities before 1964 by the Segundo Auditoria do Exército, and transferred to the PP (Presídio Hélio Gomes), a major prison in Rio.⁷⁹² After a few months, Freitas was taken back to DOPS-Rio, where he met with a number of European priests (Italian and Spanish) who had been assigned to different parts of Latin America and were arrested for trying to communicate about the conditions of torture.⁷⁹³ Then he was taken to Ilha Grande until the end of May 1971, when he was transferred to DOPS in São Paulo. He described being admitted to the prison by a man he knew from Pernambuco from his involvement in the Ligas Camponesas. In their long conversation, Alípio described the man as having “shared the same history although on different sides.”⁷⁹⁴ His encounter with the Pernambucano officer, seu Eloí, in São Paulo DOPS stands out as an anecdote that describes his experiences and political beliefs. As Freitas wrote:

“Era um homem bom e simples, mas apesar de ter vivido e trabalhado no Nordeste, sobe a mais sórdida exploração, assistido ao nascimento e crescimento das Ligas Camponesas, jamais compreendeu que sempre for a uma explorado e, o que é pior ainda, que a sua própria exploração tinha sido colocada a serviço da exploração dos seus irmãos. (...) afinal, participamos da mesma história, embora de lados

⁷⁹² Ibid., 75.

⁷⁹³ Ibid., 93-97.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid., 127.

diferentes; ele oprimido, servindo aos opressores, e eu contra os opressores, servindo aos oprimidos.”⁷⁹⁵ Even after years of torture and imprisonment, Alípio chose to continue to believe stringently in the idealist vision of “freeing” the good Brazilian peasants and workers from the “evil” state, bourgeois, and imperialists.⁷⁹⁶ He did not blame seu Eloí for siding with the Brazilian Armed Forces; instead, he portrayed the Pernambucano as a “victim,” undermining seu Eloí’s agency and decision to be a military official. This anecdote stands out in the memoir as an example of this revolutionary leader’s idealistic need to sustain a belief in the Brazilian people, and rural Nordestinos, as core supporters of the Leftist cause who had simply been manipulated by those in power. It is a perspective that brings to mind the disillusionment of Che in Bolivia and consequences of such idealism.

Later, Alípio de Freitas was taken to the Presídio Tiradentes in São Paulo, a large prison that was for both political prisoners and criminals. During this time, he also was transferred briefly to DOI-CODI in Brasília, and after this, due to the construction of the metro, Freitas was transferred with other political prisoners to the Casa de Detenção do Carandiru in 1972. Freitas described the famous prison as being much more open with better conditions: food, medical, visitation rights. At some point, all of the political prisoners were sent back to Ilha Grande and in May of 1974,

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid., 127.

⁷⁹⁶ His dedications reiterate this point: He dedicated the book in memory of Augusto José do Nascimento, “criador e organizador do Movimento Camponês do Maranhão, que se consumiu na luta pelo seu Povo como uma vela se extingue clareando a escuridão; de Mariano Joaquim da Silva, militante operário e camponês, ativista e dirigente das Ligas Camponesas, assassinado pelos Órgãos de Segurança da Ditadura Militar em junho de 1971; de João Pedro Teixeira, líder camponês da Paraíba, fundador da Liga Camponesa de Sapé, assassinado à traição pelo latifúndio paraibano; de todos aqueles que, desde 31 de março de 1964, imolaram suas vidas na luta pela liberdade do Povo Brasileiro.”

the political prisoners were transferred to the Fortaleza de Santa Cruz, as Freitas described, “a political prison where all the major revolutionary leaders had been taken since the colonial times.”⁷⁹⁷ Nine months later, Freitas was taken back to Ilha Grande, which he described as a triumphal moment. His final jail was the Presídio Esmeraldino Bandiera in Bangu where the military instated the Divisão de Segurança Especial. The conditions improved greatly: the prisoners had good medical care, food, visitation rights and could even watch movies and get together to talk and sing.⁷⁹⁸ As of 1978, Freitas remembered that the Law of National Security began to be reformed, and the military began speaking of “democracy,” a term that Freitas questioned due to the continuation of the existence of DOI-CODI and DOPS institutions.

Upon his release, journalists surrounded him at the prison doors, supposedly asking Freitas: “What are you going to do now?” His response: “What I have always done: politics.”⁷⁹⁹ In analyzing Alípio de Freitas memoir, a few key themes emerge of what he emphasizes and what he omits. It is a memoir about his personal struggle to stay alive while in prison, while suffering from torture. He describes the directors of the prisons and his torturers in detail and, when applicable, tells of their historic roles in upholding Brazilian “democracy,” as a part of the Brazilian military that

⁷⁹⁷ As he described, “A própria construção da Fortaleza já obedeceu à finalidade de ser um cárcere político, tanto assim que foi aperilhada usando todo o know-how que a depreavação da mente humana criou para impedir o progresso e a libertação social, político e cultural dos povos. Assim, esta fortaleza, miltarmente só coberta de vergonha, tinha câmaras de tortura, equipadas com os requisitos que a época conhecia, a corredores da morte, celas do passado, vazadouros para o mar, forca, etc., tudo implantado meticulosamente.” Ibid., 193.

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid., 235-237.

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid., 279.

tortured prisoners throughout time. Since Alípio was imprisoned and tortured before 1964, he saw the torture of the dictatorship (1964-1985) as part of a long history of how the Brazilian state had functioned to uphold the right of imperialist powers and the elites through the use of force (the Brazilian military). In other words, it is a political manifesto that is primarily a statement against the military and the Brazilian government.

What the testimonies and memoirs of Francisco Julião and Alípio de Freitas suggest in terms of the narrative of regional identity and the ways in which the Ligas were historicized is that the early 1980s were a highly politicized era in which social movement leaders returned to having a political voice after being silenced for over ten years. Whereas Julião's testimonies could be categorized as an exile experience, Freitas's memoir could be classified as a political prisoner's experience. Both Julião and Freitas described their suffering – exile or imprisonment – because of the unjust, military state but they also both repeatedly declared their lifelong dedication to their political projects. Neither attributed much agency to the Nordeste, portraying the rural population as victims who lacked a political consciousness and could be easily manipulated by those in control. Furthermore, both men told individualistic stories. Unlike their female counterparts, they only briefly alluded to their wives and families.

Another aspect of regional identity that surfaced in the oral histories recorded in the 1970s and early 1980s was the differences between Pernambuco and Paraíba, an area so often depicted as being the same. People interviewed from Paraíba argued that the Ligas were drastically different in Paraíba than in Pernambuco due to the leadership of Assis Lemos versus Francisco Julião. The testimony of Antônio

Augusto Macedo, one of the student leaders from the pre-1964 period in Paraíba who was involved in the Ligas Camponesas and the JUC (Juventude Universitária Católica), reflects the difference.⁸⁰⁰ Even though the reasons he gave for becoming involved with the Ligas followed the origin story of the Ligas Camponesas of Galiléia,⁸⁰¹ he drew a distinction between the Ligas in Paraíba and Pernambuco.⁸⁰² He recalled Julião as promoting revolution whereas Assis Lemos and João Goulart were more interested in a process of reforms and in turning the Ligas into legal rural unions.⁸⁰³ Joaquim Ferreira Filho, a lawyer who worked for the Ligas in Paraíba and Pernambuco (but from the state of Paraíba), claimed that the difference between the movements in the two states was that Assis Lemos believed in Ligas leadership coming from the local peasantry whereas Julião did not see this as being important.⁸⁰⁴ But, at the same time, Ferreira thought that the revolutionary politics of Julião contrasted the populist politics of Assis Lemos and João Goulart, who he saw as supporting a certain peleguismo in the projects for reforms.⁸⁰⁵

⁸⁰⁰ Antônio Augusto Macedo, depoimento. Interviewed by Eduardo Raposo. 2 February 1978. (Rio: FGV/CPDOC – História Oral, 1986).

⁸⁰¹ He recalled his involvement in the Ligas as motivated by the grave social situation of the Northeast, in which more coffins were filled with children than adults, which led the União Nacional dos Estudantes to form a temporary pact with the workers and peasants in the early 1960s.

⁸⁰² He remembered having regular contact with Assis Lemos, the Ligas leader in Paraíba, and said that Julião had minimal influence on the student movement in Paraíba. He described Lemos as being aligned with João Goulart and less radical than the peasant movements aligned with Julião.

⁸⁰³ Joaquim Ferreira Filho made the same statement about the political differences between Julião and Assis Lemos, but while Macedo claimed that Assis Lemos had greater influence in Sapé, Ferreira said that Julião had more influence because of the radical politics of the Liga of Sapé. Joaquim Ferreira Filho, depoimento. Interviewed by Eduardo Raposo, 21 June 1977. (Rio: FGV/CPDOC-História Oral, 1986), 22.

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid., 13-14.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid., 31.

In a 1978 interview with Eduardo Raposo, Assis Lemos described his political career and memories of the Ligas Camponesas, as President of the Federação dos Camponesas in Paraíba. Assis Lemos was from Areia, Paraíba but his family had been involved in politics at the state and national level, and as a student, Assis Lemos became involved in the União Nacional dos Estudantes, befriending João Goulart, and getting involved in labor organizing.⁸⁰⁶ He attended the ceremony celebrating the first Liga established in Paraíba (Sapé), but claimed that it was only by chance that the Liga was considered a part of the “Ligas Camponesas” because the rural movement in Paraíba was entirely separate.⁸⁰⁷ He described the difference between the Ligas in Paraíba and the Ligas in Pernambuco as being related to the production of sugar cane which was greater in Pernambuco, and the fact that the area of Sapé and Rio Tinto was dominated by the Lundgren factory town, that had created a feudal system in which everything was controlled by the Lundgren group.⁸⁰⁸

Assis Lemos said that in 1962, the Ligas in Paraíba split into two groups: one affiliated with Assis Lemos and João Goulart and another affiliated with Julião.⁸⁰⁹ He described Julião as a charismatic leader who was growing in national popularity, and received larger applause in many meetings than João Goulart, causing a certain rift to

⁸⁰⁶ He organized a strike in Areia in 1958 to protest a cement factory’s policy of firing pregnant women that led to the unionization of the factory workers.

⁸⁰⁷⁸⁰⁷ Similar to the case of Galiléia, the Liga of Sapé was first called something different: “Associação dos Trabalhadores e Lavradores Agrícolas de Sapé. Francisco Assis Lemos de Souza, depoimento. Interview by Eduardo Raposo, in João Pessoa, January 1978. (Rio: FGV-CPDOC-História Oral, 1985), 26.

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid., 42-47.

⁸⁰⁹ He recalled that Julião had split with everyone – Arraes, Goulart, Brizola – in 1962 and aligned himself with a group of ex-PCB militants who were interested in forming guerrilla camps in Goiás. Ibid., 86-89.

develop between the two.⁸¹⁰ Assis Lemos described Julião as a great speaker who could communicate in a poetic but simple language that everyone could understand and that was often based in Biblical stories. Supposedly, everyone liked Julião because he seemed like a simple man who was in a permanent state of suffering.⁸¹¹ But, by 1963, Julião had lost electoral support because of his split with Arraes and because of his revolutionary stance on agrarian reform that included the establishment of guerrilla focos.⁸¹² He described the problem that Julião had in terms of the problem that Che Guevara had faced in Bolivia: they both failed because the peasants did not understand the struggle that these revolutionaries were attempting to lead.⁸¹³

Another difference that Assis Lemos described between Paraíba and Pernambuco was that supposedly no communists or Trotskyists existed in Paraíba. He told of Trotskyist students coming to Paraíba as “weekend revolutionaries,” but that the rural movement in Paraíba was primarily interested in creating legal rural unions.⁸¹⁴ His testimony repeatedly emphasizes the cooperation between the peasants, students, intellectuals, and urban working class. But, he emphasized that in Paraíba, unlike Pernambuco, the leadership of the Ligas came from the peasants themselves. He also described the differences between the Ligas and the rural union movement. According to Assis Lemos, whereas the Ligas had complete flexibility in

⁸¹⁰ Ibid., 82-83.

⁸¹¹ Ibid., 83.

⁸¹² Ibid., 136-137.

⁸¹³ Ibid., 183.

⁸¹⁴ Ibid., 143-146.

terms of who was a member, the rural union required members to be affiliated with a certain type of profession.⁸¹⁵

After the coup, Assis Lemos was arrested along with most of the other Ligas leaders and spent 194 days in prison in various prisons in Pernambuco, Paraíba and Fernando de Noronha.⁸¹⁶ He described the torture that he suffered in graphic detail: beatings, pau-de-arara, putting a newspaper in his anus and lighting it on fire.⁸¹⁷ The military officers were looking for arms and believed that he knew of secret arms shipments from Cuba, using torture to try to extract a statement from Assis Lemos.⁸¹⁸ After being released from prison, he was able to work for the University of Paraíba in João Pessoa for only one year, cassado in 1966, losing all political rights for 10 years, and was dismissed as a professor. He tried to protest his cassação by making a legal argument in the Assembleia Legislativa but was denied. Although Assis Lemos spent years of the dictatorship in Rio, he never went into exile abroad, staying in Brazil until he was granted his political rights.

⁸¹⁵ Ibid., 206. The difference can also be seen as the affiliation with CONTAG (Confederação dos Trabalhadores Rurais Brasileiros) that Julião did not support because he felt it took the leadership and issues away from the Northeastern rural workers, replacing it with the interests of rural workers in the South.

⁸¹⁶ Ibid., 169 -172.

He recalled his shock when he realized that peasant leaders Pedro Fazendeiro and João Alfredo had disappeared, because he had been relieved when they were released from prison. When he realized what had occurred, he stated that he refused to be released from prison without being accompanied by his family.

UNE leader Antonio Augusto Macedo described the persecution of all the peasant leaders in Paraíba, either before or after the coup, recalling the rumor that the disappeared leaders were cremated in the usinas, in what he called bourgeois justice. Antônio Augusto Macedo, depoimento, (FGV/CPDOC).

⁸¹⁷ Assis Lemos de Souza, depoimento. (Rio: FGV-CPDOC), 172-173.

⁸¹⁸ Ibid., 173.

The differences of the memories and the experiences of the three Ligas leaders show why it is impossible to write a singular history of the Ligas Camponesas. All three men were invested in political projects that developed and changed over time. They all had different perceptions of each other than how they would define their own involvement in the struggle for land in Northeastern Brazil. And, these were all leaders of what has been categorized as a singular social movement. When other politicians and social movements – also of the political left – are taken into consideration the history of the struggle for land in the Northeast is perhaps better classified as the history of the divided Left. But, the same time, certain themes link these social movement leaders. They all claim to have supported the struggle for land or the struggle of the poor against the latifundio. They described the respect they held for leaders in terms of their courage, their ability to communicate with rural people, and their intelligence. And, they all knew of the dangerous situation that they were involved with even before the coup, facing imprisonments and witnessing acts of violence as social movement leaders before 1964, and this repression did not hinder their activism. The next section describes interviews with the Church leaders in an attempt to show how other well-known social movement leaders composed their histories of the struggle for land in the Northeast.

The Catholic Church: Melo and Crespo

Researchers at the Fundação Joaquim Nabuco and the Fundação Getúlio Vargas interviewed Padre Melo and Padre Crespo about their life histories and their memories of the 1950s and 1960s. Unlike Julião and Freitas, these men never faced

exile or imprisonment but continued to organize rural workers through the dictatorship. Both were controversial figures in the 1960s and continued to be depicted by other social movement leaders as somewhat untrustworthy because of alleged connections to the CIA and the US government, to the military and large landowners, and to leftist politicians. Unlike Francisco Julião who was also a rather controversial figure, Melo and Crespo were rarely described by other interviewees as courageous, intelligent or great leaders. But Padre Melo was particularly criticized in many of the interviews; for instance, ex-military officer Deolindo Moura described Melo as being a wolf dressed in a sheepskin who lacked legitimacy and loyalty.⁸¹⁹ Francisco Julião and Journalist Clovis Melo both described Padre Crespo as being motivated by social Christian thought representing the post-Vatican II Church, whereas they thought Melo was a demagogue and an agitator who had fluctuating ideologies.⁸²⁰ One of the key differences in the interviews with Melo and Crespo was their opinions about the dictatorship. Whereas Melo argued for a continuity of political projects before and after the coup and never criticized the dictatorship, Crespo denounced the repression of the dictatorship and remembered having spoken against the military throughout the dictatorship.

In a 1978 interview with Padre Antônio Melo, he described himself as being similar to Pope John XXIII, the *papa camponês*, a pope with peasant origins who had

⁸¹⁹ Deolindo Moura, depoimento. Interviewed by Eliane Moury Fernandes, Recife 17 September 1986 (Recife: Fundação Joaquim Nabuco – CEHIBRA), 9.

⁸²⁰ Clóvis Ribeiro do Rego Melo. Interviewed by Eliane Moury Fernandes and Jorge Zaveruch, Recife, 16 November 1984 (Recife: Fundação Joaquim Nabuco – CEHIBRA), 20; Julião, depoimento. (FGV/CPDOC), 85; 145-146.

the goal of improving the social conditions in the countryside.⁸²¹ Melo was recently ordained as a priest (1961) when he was sent to Cabo, Pernambuco as the vigário-cooperador. Melo based his talent rural organizing (versus that of Francisco Julião) in the fact that he was born and raised in the rural Northeast, which gave him a greater understanding of rural people. He said that when he arrived in Cabo, he found five Ligas organized by Julião. The emphasis that he placed on Julião and the Ligas Camponesas suggests that the reason why he organized a rural syndicate and cooperative was to compete with Julião, even though he explicitly argued that this was not the case.

He described Julião as being more interested in bringing international projects to the countryside instead of focusing on local issues.⁸²² He thought that Julião was using the peasant for his personal political gain, but did not have any actual interest in the peasants. He described Julião's influence in Cabo as being a double misunderstanding and claimed that the peasants never understood Julião's political project. They supposedly saw him for what he did not want to be seen as: an educated man, intelligent, who was a state deputy who could help them fight for better wages. The peasant was not a radical, according to Melo, but participated in the Ligas because they saw the Ligas as an immediate way to improve their own conditions.⁸²³ But at the same time, he stated that the rural union movement and

⁸²¹ Antônio Melo, depoimento. Interviewed by Aspásia Camargo and Dulce Pandolfi, Cabo, Pernambuco, April 1978. (Rio: FGV/CPDOC – História Oral, 1982), 7.

⁸²² Ibid., 20-21.

⁸²³ Ibid., 23-24.

cooperative movement led by the Church was not against the Ligas, it was simply a different strategy that operated on entirely different terms than the Ligas.⁸²⁴

Melo's testimony differs from other social movement leaders in that his narrative is triumphant. He helped the rural people in Cabo to start a rural union and the cooperative of Tiriri that allowed them to gain control over the production of sugar cane. He described Tiriri in glowing terms, speaking of its success, its victory and its fame.⁸²⁵ He claimed that the cooperativistas of Tiriri were now landowners and lived like *petit bourgeoisie*, unlike other rural people who were not involved in a cooperative.⁸²⁶ He also did not denounce the dictatorship; in fact, Melo claimed that the same acts of violence and torture had taken place during Arraes's years as governor.⁸²⁷ For this reason, Melo considered himself a man without ideology, even though he also claimed to have been extremely interested in politics.⁸²⁸ He saw ideology as dangerous and what led people to become fanatics.⁸²⁹

Melo used the discourse of modernization and progress, but used it to show continuity between the democratic period of the 1950s and early 1960s and the dictatorship. This was his view on the history of Brazil: that it has always been a country of rich and poor and the coup of 1964 did not substantially change what was already in place. The modernization and progress that had occurred before 1964 such as the Paulo Afonso dam and Petrobrás continued during the dictatorship with new industrialization efforts, the construction of the Transamazon highway, and the newly

⁸²⁴ Ibid., 33.

⁸²⁵ Ibid., 27.

⁸²⁶ Ibid., 35.

⁸²⁷ Ibid., 59-60.

⁸²⁸ Ibid., 15-16.

⁸²⁹ Ibid., 60.

instated telephone, television and radio systems that now functioned throughout Brazil.⁸³⁰ He declared these projects as beautiful things, and said that nothing had hindered the great and slow march forward of the great Brazilian nation.⁸³¹ But, Melo's position on continuity and on the process of amnesty suggested that he was not a critic of the dictatorship. In fact, in the testimony he raised cases of terrorists who had committed murders as not being eligible for amnesty, comparing the "terrorist acts" in Brazil to the death of Aldo Moro in Italy. In the early 1980s, this position would have aligned Melo with the political right and with the dictatorship.⁸³²

Padre Paulo Crespo was also born in the rural Northeast, in Bom Conselho, Pernambuco, and studied in the Instituto Católica de Paris, where he observed the ways in which the priests worked with the rural population.⁸³³ Upon his return to Brazil, he worked in Jaboatão (known as "little Moscow"), and in an interview with the Fundação Joaquim Nabuco, Crespo told a story about how he became political consciousness of the injustices in the Northeast. As a new vigário, Crespo made frequent visits to houses of the landowners and the peasants. He portrayed the poverty of the rural communities in the area: sick children without clothing, screams of common criminals coming from the local jail because of police brutality, people dying because they did not have enough food or health care to survive. He described his moment of awareness in coming when he visited a large landowner in the area who told him to wait a minute because he needed to talk to a rural worker about

⁸³⁰ Ibid., 77.

⁸³¹ Ibid., 78.

⁸³² Ibid., 80-81.

⁸³³ Enes Paulo Crespo, depoimento. Interviewed by Aspásia Alcântara de Camargo and Dulce Chaves Pandolfi, Recife, 14 – 15 April 1978. (Rio: FGV/CPDOC – História Oral, 1982), 4.

moving out the furniture in his house. Crespo said that the furniture was new and in good condition, and the landowner replied that it was five years old and was an embarrassment because other landowners saw this as a sign that he could not afford new furniture.⁸³⁴ As he described, “Eu fui vendo aquilo tudo e comecei a falar nos sermões da igreja, questionando, perguntando, o que estava acontecendo? Pessoas morrendo de fome, maltradas, espancadas, mortas, assssindadas, sem nenhuma providendência. (...) Isso foi me despertando com tudo aquilo que eu tinha visto com Monsenhor Cardin, André Pierre, lá na França.”⁸³⁵

So, in Jaboatão, Crespo began organizing rural workers in what became known as the Serviço de Orientação Rural de Pernambuco (SORPE).⁸³⁶ He claimed that Pernambuco was the nation’s leader in the rural labor movement.⁸³⁷ The first phase of the rural unionization process was to legalize rural unions. Crespo described this process in terms of the narrative of slavery. Supposedly, Melo had met with the Minister of Agriculture on the 13 of May 1960, and argued for legalizing rural unions based on the fact that even if the Minister lost his post (as Princesa Isabel had lost the throne), he would be remembered in history as the person who had changed the law to end white slavery in Brazil.⁸³⁸ Although the law did not change immediately after the

⁸³⁴ Ennes Paulo Crespo, depoimento. Interviewed by Eliane Moury Fernandes and Jorge Zeverucha, Recife, 10 July 1985 (Recife: Fundação Joaquim Nabuco – CEHIBRA), 8.

⁸³⁵ Ibid., 8-9.

⁸³⁶ Crespo, depoimento, (FGV/CPDOC), 5-6.

⁸³⁷ Crespo, depoimento, (Fundação Joaquim Nabuco – CEHIBRA), 14.

⁸³⁸ Crespo, depoimento, (FGV/CPDOC), 10.

incident, it created a platform to criticize the government and argue for the legalization of rural unions at the national level.⁸³⁹

Crespo's views on Julião and the Ligas were that the Church was involved in organizing rural unions that had a broader community base and attracted a wide variety of rural workers, not exclusively peasants. Crespo also claimed that while the Ligas were based in the Northeast, the Church movement was focused on creating a national movement in support of agrarian reform and legal rural unionization.⁸⁴⁰ He knew Julião well – Julião's first wife was Crespo's cousin – and while they disagreed on certain issues, they always respected one another.⁸⁴¹ Crespo stated that Julião was never a radical: Julião's project for agrarian reform was supposedly always based on making legal changes within the legal system.⁸⁴² He claimed that the media had made a "myth" of Julião, turning him into a Che Guevara, even though according to Crespo, he was not like Guevara.⁸⁴³ Crespo recalled that by 1962, some of the Ligas and their leaders had become affiliated with the Communist Party, which caused social unrest in the area and created skepticism for the Ligas on the part of some of the Catholic priests.⁸⁴⁴ He said that the divisions in the Left and struggles over leadership in the Northeast was "sad" and created a good deal of confusion: what the political parties and movements failed to recognize was that the leadership of the peasant movement needed to come from the peasants themselves.⁸⁴⁵

⁸³⁹ Crespo, depoimento. (Fundação Joaquim Nabuco – CEHIBRA), 15.

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁸⁴¹ Crespo, depoimento. (FGV/CPDOC), 6.

⁸⁴² Ibid., 7.

⁸⁴³ Crespo, depoimento. (Fundação Joaquim Nabuco – CEHIBRA), 30.

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid., 15; and Crespo, depoimento. (FGV/CPDOC), 20-24.

⁸⁴⁵ Crespo, depoimento. (Fundação Joaquim Nabuco – CEHIBRA), 25.

In the FGV interview, Crespo emphasized the broad coalition of priests who were involved in the rural union movement throughout Northeastern Brazil. He commented on Padre Alípio, who he described as being dangerous and too radical. Alípio supposedly followed the line of violent armed revolution whereas the majority of the Church leaders in the Northeast supported a non-violent movement based on reforms.⁸⁴⁶ His view of Padre Melo was that Melo was a person who wanted to have a public presence, speaking on television and radio whereas Crespo described himself as the opposite of this: Crespo supposedly focused on organizing rural workers to improve their conditions. But he thought that Melo's role in the movement was necessary because the Brazilian elite needed to have a better understanding of the rural issues to create support for the rural movement.⁸⁴⁷

Crespo discussed the involvement with the CIA in the interview, stating that the Instituto Americano Para o Desenvolvimento do Sindicalismo Livre (Iadesil) provided the rural union movement with funds to build community centers and established the Ligas das Cooperativas Americanas but no one knew if the movement was linked to the CIA. Funds came from all over the world but Crespo claimed that the money was designated for projects that the peasants and rural workers in the Northeast created.⁸⁴⁸ Similar to Melo, Crespo claimed that his motivation was not based on any ideology, but that it came from his religious orientation and followed the lines of Pope John XXIII.⁸⁴⁹ This orientation influenced the creation of what he

⁸⁴⁶ Crespo, depoimento. (FGV/CPDOC), 33.

⁸⁴⁷ Ibid., 34.

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid., 11-12.

⁸⁴⁹ Ibid., 14-15.

described as a global movement against the latifundio system and for the harmonic and peaceful development of society.⁸⁵⁰

After the coup, Crespo described the repression that occurred in the Northeast. He claimed that over 5,000 peasants were arrested in the days following the coup, and Crespo felt the only way to react was to try to salvage what was possible: “sentia como um barco que foi destruído por uma bomba e os destroços estavam no mar, algumas tábuas estavam boiando e era preciso que os trabalhadores se agarrassem aqueles tábuas para se salvarem.”⁸⁵¹ Padre Crespo was held “suspect” by the military, which resulted in Padre Melo being placed in charge of the rural unions and SORPE.⁸⁵² When asked about why the Church took so long to develop a stance against the military, Crespo replied that the Church was anti-political but had always supported those in power. However, the repression was supposedly “so brutal” – with the people being massacred by the military – that this experience caused the Church to reflect upon its position. While the tortures and arrests were significant in the days after the coup, Crespo said that with AI-5, the situation grew worse since the military leaders had complete and total power, even greater than King Louis XIV’s control of the state.⁸⁵³ Unlike Melo, Crespo was often questioned by the military for making regular public statements against the dictatorship.⁸⁵⁴ He described the

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid., 41.

⁸⁵¹ Crespo, depoimento. (Fundação Joaquim Nabuco – CEHIBRA), 43.

⁸⁵² Ibid., 22.

⁸⁵³ Crespo described this: “Foi um crescente de autoritarismo, mando e até chegamos ao ponto de AI-5, que deu totais e absolutos poderes a um homem mais do que em qualquer época da história, nem o rei Luis XIV teve tanto poder como ele dizia ‘O Estado sou Eu,’ mesmo assim tinha menos poderes do que o presidente do Brasil com AI-5.” Ibid., 58.

⁸⁵⁴ Ibid., 59.

military as profoundly motivated by the National Security Doctrine, which raised the State as a “new God, in which everything and every one had to work to guarantee the State’s supreme rule through any methods including death, repression, assassinations, torture, expulsions, cassações, Institutional Acts.”⁸⁵⁵

Padre Crespo left the priesthood during the dictatorship, deciding to marry in the early 1970s, although he remained active in the Church and as a rural leader. He described his wife as a simple peasant woman who had no education and who was 16 years younger than him, but they had a child each year that they had been married – five children in total – and were extremely happy and worked well together with to organize Northeastern peasants.⁸⁵⁶ He believed that one of the great injustices of the Catholic Church was the vow of celibacy that was against the natural right of man to have a family. He wanted to be a priest and his parishioners wanted him to continue as their priest, but the Church prohibited him from having a family.⁸⁵⁷ Even though his rights were taken away by the Church, he found himself in a much more powerful position within the Church after his marriage, selected to serve as the Regional Secretary of the Northeast II, coordinating the pastoral activities of 19 dioceses.⁸⁵⁸

Both Melo and Crespo emphasized in these interviews their rural personal background, which they used to state their legitimacy as rural union and rural cooperative leaders. They also both referred to the Pope and the politics of Vatican II, to associate themselves with a broader political movement sanctioned by the Church. On the one hand, Melo presented a triumphant narrative depicting himself

⁸⁵⁵ Ibid., 60.

⁸⁵⁶ Crespo, depoimento. (FGV/CPDOC), 49.

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid., 47-48.

⁸⁵⁸ Ibid., 48-49.

as someone who had helped to bring progress to the rural Northeast, a narrative that is more often associated with the military governments. Crespo, on the other hand, depicted himself in terms of a more familiar narrative of the rural Nordeste: a person from rural origins, who fought and suffered throughout his life against injustices to help Nordestinos. The way these men explained the importance of history also exemplifies their differences and also shows how Marxism and Christianity in the Northeast often went hand and hand at the discursive level.

Crespo described the importance of history as being something that is made in small steps accompanied by the cooperation and solidarity of a larger group of people. He did not believe in history being made by individuals but that history was a product of groups of people working together.⁸⁵⁹ Melo ended his interview with the researchers at the Fundação Getúlio Vargas with an anecdote. He described having seen the theater play, “Eles não usam black-tie.”⁸⁶⁰ Gianfrancesco Guarnieri’s play usually is interpreted as a Marxist narrative, but Melo interpreted it as being Christian because of the solidarity the mother expressed in the play when she argued with her son about crossing the strike line and returning to work in the factory. Melo thought it was poetic and beautiful that she believed in the concept of worker solidarity and saw her own suffering as part of the common good: she wanted everyone in the favela and the factory to be able to have better conditions. Melo’s example raises the metaphor of the family and the nation, and the need to keep the family together even through suffering to improve the conditions for the entire national family. Through this example it is easy to see the slippage or fluidity of discourses, or at least how

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid., 49.

⁸⁶⁰ Melo, depoimento. (FGV/CPDOC), 90-91.

Melo could ignore the Marxist theme, and read the play as Christian and also in-line with the military discourse of needing to sacrifice and work together as a family for social progress for all.

The Brazilian Communist Party in Northeastern Brazil

Communist Party leaders in the Northeast were largely absent by name from many of the sources in the 1950s and 1960s – with the exception of the Communist Party publications – due to the illegality of the Brazilian Communist Party and the Communist Party of Brazil. By the early 1980s, people with communist affiliations acquired a greater political voice because of the military's persecution of the Communist Party and the push to question the legitimacy of the military regime. The politics of the Cold War had shifted by this period and it was not as precarious to identify with the Communist Party. This section analyzes the memoirs and interviews with Paulo Cavalcanti, a PCB militant from the Northeast who published a four volume memoir entitled, *O caso eu conto como o caso foi*; and, Gregório Bezerra, one of the key leaders in the PCB's rural syndicate movement in the 1960s, who was arrested and tortured with great visibility in the early days of the coup. One of the differences between the PCB testimonies and those of the Church and Ligas is generational. The PCB leaders emphasized their previous political experiences in detail that stretched back to the 1930s. This established these leaders as the "old" Left, affiliated with the Partidão.

Paulo Cavalcanti was from Olinda originally, and came from a family of large landowners from Escada, Pernambuco. He described in the interview with Eliane

Moury Fernandes how his political career began in the sertão as a Promotor Pública in Sertânia in 1947. To describe the type of inequalities and power structures of the rural Northeast that led to his political involvement, he recalled a specific case of a death of a rural worker who a large landowner and doctor both claimed died of liver failure but when Cavalcanti examined the body, he found eight fractures: The man had died of a severe beating by the administrator.⁸⁶¹ In his memoir, he described the first changes in the sertão as coming from the Prestes Column and Lampião, who he saw as the first attempts to give the rural people hope for freedom from the system of coronelismo.⁸⁶² He claimed that the PCB's involvement in the countryside only started under the government of Cid Sampaio, around the same time as the Ligas Camponesas.⁸⁶³

He described Julião as being a mystic Marxist who wanted to imitate the Cuban experience in the Northeast.⁸⁶⁴ Cavalcanti claimed that Julião used the “historical ghosts” such as Antônio Conselheiro strategically and intelligently to turn the Northeast into an area seen as a “barrel of gunpowder.”⁸⁶⁵ He recalled German and Swedish filmmakers coming to the Northeast in the early 1960s to film Julião

⁸⁶¹ Paulo de Figueiredo Cavalcanti, depoimento. Interviewed by Eliane Moury Fernandes, Recife, 22 April 1982. (Recife: Fundação Joaquim Nabuco-CEHIBRA, 1996), 18-19.

⁸⁶² Paulo Cavalcanti, *O caso eu conto, como o caso foi (da coluna Prestes à queda de Arraes, Memórias)* (São Paulo: Editora Alfa-Omega, 1978), 66-67.

⁸⁶³ Cavalcanti, depoimento. (Fundação Joaquim Nabuco-CEHIBRA), 60-61.

⁸⁶⁴ As he stated, “Eu já disse uma vez que a gente não sabe onde termina Marx nas idéias de Julião e começa Cristo, ou onde termina Marx e Cristo e começa Chaplin. Ele é muito chapiliano, muito marxista e muito cristão, mistura tudo isso dá Francisco Julião Arruda de Paula.” Ibid., 86.

⁸⁶⁵ Ibid., 87.

who they saw as the “new Guevara” or the “Guevara of the Northeast.”⁸⁶⁶ He also stated that he opposed the politics and strategies of Julião and said that the military and the right used Julião to justify the coup.⁸⁶⁷ But, similar to other people interviewed, he said that Julião played an instrumental role in raising the issue of agrarian reform throughout Brazil.⁸⁶⁸ In his memoir, he went as far to state that even though the two had profound disagreements, they had a long-standing friendship that “eu preservo com carinho.”⁸⁶⁹

Cavalcanti described proudly the rural union of Palmares, which he described as being the biggest union in all of Brazil, overpowering even the urban unions in São Paulo’s ABC region, with 25,000 associates and a well-established infrastructure.⁸⁷⁰ He claimed that the PCB was a greater force in Palmares than the Ligas Camponesas, and that by 1962, most of the leaders were peasants or rural workers.⁸⁷¹ This was significant in the popularity and success of the rural union of Palmares because, as Cavalcanti said, the “Nordestino peasant is extremely skeptical of outsiders.”⁸⁷²

In his memories of the MCP (Movimento de Cultura Popular), Cavalcanti described his view of history.

“A história não tem coincidências, não tem acasos, tudo na história aconteceu porque tem que acontecer, não por fatalidade. A história não registra acasos nem coincidências, a gente não pode ficar esperando sentado que as coisas se modifiquem, a gente tem que..temos que nos inserir no curso dos acontecimentos e ajudar a

⁸⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁸ Ibid., 86.

⁸⁶⁹ Cavalcanti, *O caso eu conto (da coluna Prestes à queda de Arraes, Memórias)*, 298.

⁸⁷⁰ Cavalcanti, depoimento. (Fundação Joaquim Nabuco-CEHIBRA), 88.

⁸⁷¹ Ibid., 88-89.

⁸⁷² Ibid., 89.

marcha, inexorável dos fatos, mas com a nossa participação. O homem faz a história na medida em que...Até as personalidades fazem história, a história não é feita só pelo povo, pelas massas; o próprio marxismo diz que o líder, a personalidade faz história, mas na medida em que ele toma pé, toma conhecimento das lutas sociais, do seu dinamismo, do seu processo de desenvolvimeto, isso se insure na realidade, ele aí dá o curso, o curso correto aos acontecimentos, é o papel das lideranças.”⁸⁷³

In his memories of the coup, Cavalcanti described the military’s actions as being “uneducated” and extreme, with numerous arrests and invasions of people’s homes. In one anecdote he described how the military sacked people’s homes and the public library, searching for “subversive” materials. He said that the illiterate soldiers simply took all the books in people’s homes, and described how one of the books they considered “subversive” in the state library was on Cubism because it supposedly had a similar spelling to Cuba.⁸⁷⁴ In his memoir, Cavalcanti discussed his imprisonment and relations with other political prisoners after the coup, and also described his experiences living in São Paulo clandestinely. He described in detail the arrest, beating, and imprisonment of Gregório Bezerra, which was well publicized as a bloody and gruesome spectacle.

Gregório Bezerra was Cavalcanti’s hero.⁸⁷⁵ As he described, “Luís Carlos Prestes was the ‘Caveleiro de Esperanza’ oriented in top-down political organizing. Gregório entered the PCB anonymously, as a military soldier and grew within the

⁸⁷³ Ibid., 81.

⁸⁷⁴ Cavalcanti, *O caso eu conto, (da coluna Prestes à queda de Arraes, Memórias)*, 346.

⁸⁷⁵ Cavalcanti described Bezerra as a great Communist: “valentia, dignidade, capacidade de luta, ternura humana e aguda percepção dos problemas sociais.” Paulo Cavalcanti, *O caso eu conto, como o caso foi (A luta clandestina)* (Recife: Editora Guararapes, 1985), 282.

Party to become an extraordinary figure.”⁸⁷⁶ In his memoir, Cavalcanti wrote, “Para mim, Gregório Bezerra encarnava a mais autêntica figura de líder popular, por suas origens sociais, por seu amor às massas sofridas e desamparadas, por seu nível ideológico, por uma permanente presença da consciência de classe.”⁸⁷⁷ He discussed Bezerra’s role in the 1935 Communist Intention as extremely brave. As he described,

Gregório Bezerra é uma lenda nos Estados nordestinos, misturando-se com a de Antonio Silvino e Lampião, ‘o mito de Padre Cícero, as rezas de Frei Damião, do operário ao matuto, do jovem moço ao ancião, ninguém duvidando dele, que tem lá no coração, o amor que a gente cria por não saber dizer não, quando se vê faltar carne, na mesa de quantos são a maioria do povo, passando fome e aflição,’⁸⁷⁸

To legitimize the perception of Bezerra in the popular imagination, Cavalcanti reproduced a poem (literatura de cordel), that described Bezerra as extremely brave and “made of steel and flowers (feito de ferro e de flor).”⁸⁷⁹ The eulogy Cavalcanti pronounced at Bezerra’s funeral depicted him in terms of regional identity: “Sua vida, da infância até hoje, foi um resumo da vida do homem rural, retrato típico de uma paisagem humana que o Nordeste brasileiro oferece ao país nos seus dramas pungentes de fome e sofrimento a cada período de crise.”⁸⁸⁰

Eliane Moury Fernandes interviewed Gregório Bezerra in Recife in 1982 and Bezerra wrote his own extensive memoir while in prison after the coup. Bezerra was born in Panelas do Miranda, Pernambuco, one of seventeen children, whose parents were illiterate peasants without land. Bezerra recalled his political interest

⁸⁷⁶ Cavalcanti, depoimento. (Fundação Joaquim Nabuco-CEHIBRA), 68.

⁸⁷⁷ Cavalcanti, *O caso eu conto (A luta clandestina)*, 281.

⁸⁷⁸ Cavalcanti, *O caso eu conto (da coluna Prestes à queda de Arraes, Memórias)*, 149.

⁸⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 148-149.

⁸⁸⁰ Cavalcanti, *O caso eu conto (A luta clandestina)*, 287.

starting as a result of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, which he said had great repercussions in Pernambuco. At the time, he was working as a stone worker and his union went to the streets to march for solidarity.⁸⁸¹ He was arrested – at the age of 17 – and sentenced to seven years of prison of which he served five. In prison, he met Antônio Silvino, who he described as an honest man who gave him good advice about keeping his mouth closed about Communism. According to Bezerra, Silvino had told him that one day, Communism would prevail but it would take a long time because when “quando Deus dá um homem como Lenin na Russia, passa cem anos para dar outro em qualquer outro país do mundo.”⁸⁸²

Throughout the interview, Bezerra made frequent references to Nordeste identity. For instance, in one story about when Bezerra was in the army and had to choose a burro for service, he remembered selected the best burros, to which one of the other soldiers said, “You don’t even seem like a Nordeste! Remember, in the Northeast you have to pick the animal for the Northeast. The skinny ones are the strong ones and these are the best for the machine gun squadron.”⁸⁸³ He also recalled the hatred the Paulistas felt for the Nordestinos when he was in São Paulo during the 1932 Revolution. He recalled them saying that if Getúlio was not able to mobilize so many Nordestinos – mainly the flagelados – then the Paulistas would have been victorious.⁸⁸⁴

⁸⁸¹ Gregório Bezerra, depoimento. Interviewed by Eliane Moury Fernandes, Recife 28 May 1982 (Recife: Fundação Joaquim Nabuco, CEHIBRA), 1-2.

⁸⁸² Ibid., 16.

⁸⁸³ Ibid., 21.

⁸⁸⁴ Ibid., 31.

Bezerra spent a good portion of his life in prison, receiving tortures and beatings. Besides his arrest and imprisonment after the 1964 coup, he was also arrested and beaten after the 1935 Communist Intentona, sentenced to 28 years of prison.⁸⁸⁵ And yet he always described himself as remaining faithful to his political convictions and resisting the torture and death threats. He was released after the end of the Estado Novo, and went to work in Goiás in the rural luta clandestina.⁸⁸⁶

Bezerra described Julião as a great ally, a nationalist and democrat who was intelligent and a great leader. He said Julião had “uma sensibilidade de massa extraordinária, ele falava para o camponês com uma linguagem simples que ele entendia.”⁸⁸⁷ He described the difference in their political beliefs as related to the Cuban Revolution. Whereas Julião felt that Brazil could also succeed with an agrarian, anti-imperialist revolution, Bezerra felt that Cuba and Brazil had two different situations that made such an objective impossible to reach.⁸⁸⁸ He described Julião as being “persona grata” of Fidel.⁸⁸⁹ And he said that one of the major problems with the Ligas is that their leadership did not come from the peasantry.⁸⁹⁰ He claimed that although many different groups of the Left had been active in rural social movements in the early 1960s, the PCB had the majority and thus felt more secure about obtaining hegemony of the rural movement.⁸⁹¹

⁸⁸⁵ Ibid., 45.

⁸⁸⁶ Ibid., 101.

⁸⁸⁷ Ibid., 106.

⁸⁸⁸ Ibid., 107.

⁸⁸⁹ Ibid., 136.

⁸⁹⁰ Ibid., 140.

⁸⁹¹ Ibid., 109.

Bezerra painted the success of the PCB rural unions in terms of ideas associated with modernization. He said that the rural union of Palmares had raised the standard of living in the countryside that that people had enough money to consume meat, beans, rice, pasta.⁸⁹² With the minimum wage law established in 1963, the stores filled with things to buy: clothing, bicycles, radios, mattresses, chairs. “Os rapazes já compravam suas bicicletas para passear aos domingos com as suas namoradas. As donas de casa já compravam mesa e tamborete para comer sentadas.”⁸⁹³ While most of the other rural leaders depicted the achievements in terms of having land and creating rural organizations, Bezerra described the success as related to the possibility to buy material goods. Bezerra also claimed that the rural workers saw this success as related to the government of Miguel Arraes, who they referred to as “pai Arraia.”⁸⁹⁴

Bezerra remembered the details of his violent arrest. He was beaten until blood flowed from every inch of his skin, hair ripped out of his head, dragged behind a car, and paraded through the streets of Recife. The military officers shouted to the people on the street to look at the “monster,” the “dog” who wanted to burn babies but Bezerra remembers that what gave him strength was the fact that the people refused to look. At one stopping point in the parade, a group of women started crying when they saw his condition but this only made the military officer beat him more.⁸⁹⁵ This belief in people was the major narrative that framed his life history, repeatedly

⁸⁹² Ibid., 111.

⁸⁹³ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁴ Bezerra described two separate stories of peasants who destroyed their radios after hearing the radio announcers speak poorly of Arraes, which according to Bezerra, demonstrated the great allegiance the rural workers felt for Arraes. Ibid., 112.

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid., 161-162.

stating his roots, political actions, and entire life experiences as being motivated by the “povo Brasileiro.”⁸⁹⁶ He was imprisoned for five and a half years in almost complete isolation. He was one of the political prisoners who was released because of the kidnapping of the US Ambassador to Brazil, Charles Burk Elbrick in September 1969. Even though he accepted his liberation from prison, he spoke against the action of the kidnapping, writing a letter, “Declaração ao Povo Brasileiro.” The letter stated that he continued to be a Marxist-Leninist, and would continue to fight alongside the people of Brazil but that he was completely against the fight against individuals.

Although the Northeast had rural unions in the 1980s, Bezerra did not see them as truly defending rural workers rights. He claimed that the military regime had succeeded in killing, torturing, capturing, and beating but that they had done nothing for agrarian reform because he saw the military was linked to the bourgeoisie and foreign multinational companies.⁸⁹⁷ He described the changes that had taken place in the countryside during the dictatorship as developing the best land into a true paradise for multinational companies and latifundiarios while at the same time turning the lives of rural people into a “true hell” of suffering and exploitation.⁸⁹⁸ Bezerra described the military dictatorship as ruining the rural Brazilian family: men no

⁸⁹⁶ As he stated at the end of the interview, “Nunca sentei em um banco de escola, minha escola, minha universidade tem sido o povo. O pouco que sei foi o povo quem me ensinou. Ele foi o meu educador, o meu professor.” Ibid.,170.

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid., 155.

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid.

longer could work their land, children were hungry and could not attend school, and women turned into prostitutes.⁸⁹⁹ As he described:

“Também [a ditadura militar] aumentou a prostituição, inclusive a infantil, o que é uma calamidade. Mocinhas, onze, doze anos, prostituídas. Essas creaturinhas não se prostituem pelo vício, mas em consequência da fome, da miséria. Na maioria das vezes vendem o seu corpo em troca de meia dúzia de pão seco, de um punhado de arroz ou de farinha ou de um copo de leite para levar para alimentar sua mãe ou seu irmão que está com fome. Então, é um capitalismo selvagem, brutal.”⁹⁰⁰

Film Interlude: *Cabra marcado para morrer*

During the Cold War, film became more accessible to independent or revolutionary filmmakers, and technology advancements made it feasible to produce films outside of the studio system. In Brazil, the CPC da UNE (Center Popular of Culture of the National Student Union) participated in film projects such as Eduardo Coutinho’s *Cabra marcado para morrer*. *Cabra marcado* is a documentary that ties together past (1964) and present (1980s). One part of the documentary is about a film project started in 1964 by Coutinho and the UNE Volante about the life and death of João Pedro Teixeira, the filming of which was interrupted by the military coup. Another part is about the rural workers from Galiléia and the non-professional actors who participated in the film, and their experiences and memories of the 1960s, of the filming process, and during the dictatorship. A third part tells the story of Elizabeth Teixeira and her children. Elizabeth had gone into hiding after the coup to avoid persecution, changing her name and leaving her children behind with relatives, to

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid.

eventually arrive in a remote town in Rio Grande do Norte. She only remained in contact with her eldest son, Abraão, and worked as a schoolteacher. The documentary forces Elizabeth and her children to deal with their past and their family, which spread throughout Brazil and even to Cuba during the dictatorship. The youngest children had no memory of their mother or father.

This interaction between people's memories and actual footage and images of people twenty years earlier provides rich material for analyzing the contact between visual images and oral histories and the "reality effect" of the documentary. As Sarah Yakhni argues, "Essas imagens adquirem um caráter de material de arquivo – imagens que eram concretas e datadas passam a ter um cunho exemplar e mais abstrato, no sentido à retórica do personagem."⁹⁰¹ Coutinho mixed film footage of a fictional re-enactment of the story of João Pedro Teixeira with the memories of the non-professional actors who were actually Ligas participants, at times interjecting soundbites from the 1980s to narrate the 1964 footage. This constant interplay between past and present, a fictional film and the interviews with the actors about their lives creates a perception of a historical reality.⁹⁰² John Beverley's interpretation of testimonial literature provides a way to analyze this factor, since *Cabra marcado* shares many characteristics with this literary genre:

What is important about testimonio is that it produces, if not the real, then certainly a sensation of experiencing the real that has determinate effects on the reader that are different from those produced by even the most realist or "documentary" fiction. More

⁹⁰¹ Sarah Yakhni, " 'Cabra marcado para morrer' – um filme que faz história," download. Published 28 August 2000. (USP, Faculdade de Ciências sociais)

⁹⁰² In addition, Coutinho used newspaper clippings and photographs from the early 1960s to legitimize his narrative as the history of the Ligas Camponesas.

than an interpretation of reality, the testimonio is a trace of the Real, of that history which, as such, is inexpressible. The documentary also fills the need of recuperating the real, the lost history, producing an even stronger reality effect due to the visual images, interviews, and the historical context when the film was released. As Antonio Montenegro has argued, the film was an attempt to recuperate the memories, and to “interrupt, to erase the silence, the loss, the pain and the sadness [of the dictatorship].”⁹⁰³

While the film was politically significant in shaping and informing a consensus about the dictatorship and the Northeast in the early 1980s, it must not be conflated as being a “true” history of the Ligas. Coutinho never addresses the issue that the narrative of the film – while based on a true story – was in fact a script that he created, as Ramos explains, “com personagens tipificadas e diálogos distanciados da cultura camponesa que desejavam retratar.”⁹⁰⁴ Coutinho intended the original film to also have this realistic authenticity, using João Pedro’s wife and children, although filming in a completely different location than Sapé, Paraíba, and based on Coutinho’s representations of the Ligas and of rural people.⁹⁰⁵ In other words, the

⁹⁰³ Antônio Torres Montenegro, “*Cabra marcado para morrer: entre a memória e a história*,” *A História vai ao cinema: vinte filmes brasileiros comentados por historiadores*. Org. Maria de Carvalho Soares and Jorge Ferreira, (Rio: Editora Afiliado, 2001), 191.

⁹⁰⁴ Ramos points out that the original film was tightly scripted, based on the information that Elizabeth had shared with Coutinho in a meeting in Sapé in 1963. Alcides Freire Ramos, “A historicidade de *Cabra marcado para morrer* (1964-84, Eduardo Coutinho). <http://nuevomundo.revues.org/document1520.html?format=print>. Accessed 29 November 2006. P.4.

⁹⁰⁵ Ramos examines the style of camera angles used to make the film seem as if it was all shot in one location in real time. He discusses how this realistic style, close to Italian neorealismo, helped to create an effect so that the viewer confuses the images and sounds with a sense of reality. Alcides Freire Ramos, “A historicidade de *Cabra marcado para morrer* (1964-84, Eduardo Coutinho).

“archival” film footage and interviews portrayed Coutinho’s version of the Ligas and of rural Nordestinos, which must be seen as part of the political project of the CPC da UNE filmmakers and intellectuals, not the “actual” story of the peasants. This issue is not addressed in the 1984 version; in fact, Coutinho’s intention seems to be to portray the story of the film as the actual story of the Ligas. As Antônio Montenegro argued, the ways in which the filmmakers interviewed the participants in the 1980s also left little space for them to respond in their own words; they simply responded to the questions asked with a few phrases, giving Coutinho greater control over the type of narrative constructed in the film.⁹⁰⁶

While some of the images were shot to connect the 1964 history to the present in the 1980s and create this reality effect, their staged quality exemplifies that the documentary is in fact a representation. For instance, Coutinho chose to film a “classic” portrayal of Nordeste women: the image of a woman resting her arm on a window of a rural house, peering outside. Photographers of the “third world” seem to love repeating this image: a solemn woman inside a poor house looking out her window to the world that she sees, in many ways reflective of Dorothea Lange’s image of “Migrant Woman” from 1936. Coutinho filmed Elizabeth in this position in 1964 and in 1984, providing a familiar image to identify her as a “poor woman.” Another frequently repeated image is that of the staged photograph of Nordeste families, often seen in photographs in people’s homes and used by Brazilian filmmakers to

<http://nuevomundo.revues.org/document1520.html?format=print>. Accessed 29 November 2006. P. 6.

⁹⁰⁶ Antônio Torres Montenegro, “*Cabra marcado para morrer: entre a memória e a história*,” *A História vai ao cinema: vinte filme brasileiros comentados por historiadores*. Org. Maria de Carvalho Soares and Jorge Ferreira, (Rio: Editora Afiliado, 2001), 186-187.

identify a family as Nordesteño. The family lines up tallest to shortest and pose rigidly, like stick figures, without smiles on their faces. Coutinho also uses this image to portray a continuity between 1964 and 1984, although in the images from the 1980s, the staging of such an image is even clearer because he shows one rural family not exactly in order, shifting the children around to create the visual depiction that is associated with images of Nordesteño families.

The final image of the 1964 footage that Coutinho uses in 1983 film is of Elizabeth going to the window and saying, “Tem gente lá fora.” Although the audience does not know the situation or who was outside, Coutinho masterfully uses this phrase to infer the threat of the military coup. He asks many of original participants to repeat the phrase, suggesting that they all remembered the last scene shot in 1964, and immediately shifts the narrative to discuss what happened after the coup on the Engenho Galiléia and with the film crew. Coutinho uses a voice-over to describe how the film crew fled in groups of three into the forest and took separate buses to Recife to avoid arrest.

The DOPS-PE files on *Cabra marcado* are located in the prontuário funcionário for the Rede Ferroviário do Nordeste. A series of testimonies suggest that the military took an interest in the film project and its connection to the Northeastern Railway because the Railway had loaned the filmmakers a truck and two drivers because the Railroad (ex) manager thought that the film would be good as a tool of advertising for the Railways.⁹⁰⁷ A report on the film project from 18 August 1964

⁹⁰⁷ Secretária da Segurança Pública – Pernambuco. Prontuário Funcionário: Rêde Ferroviária do Nordeste, no. 448. Relatório. “Rêde Ferroviária Federal S/A. Subcomissão de processo sumário de investigações” No.0278B, 97. DOPS-PE. Recife.

labeled the filmmakers as “subversive” and affiliated with the Communist Party. The report described the film as having the objective to exploit the circumstances that involved the life and death of João Pedro Teixeira, who had been involved in a subversive movement in Sapé, Paraíba.⁹⁰⁸ In a 26 August 1964 report, the ex-manager of the railway was found guilty of committing the crime described in Article 10 of the Law of National Security: helping in an incorrect manner, with the services of the Rede Ferroviária do Nordeste these entities who represent the Communist Party. The fact that he loaned the truck and drivers free of charge further implicated the ex-manager, proving his guilt.⁹⁰⁹ This report demonstrates the actual danger that Elizabeth Teixeira faced after the coup. In the film, she describes running from one house to another after the coup, before finally deciding to go into hiding and internal exile in an isolated rural community in Rio Grande do Norte, cutting contact with her family and community.

Coutinho’s film also shows his quest to relocate Elizabeth and her children. Even though Elizabeth was a social movement leader and ran for state deputy in 1962, many of the scenes with Elizabeth and her children are uncomfortable because of the filmmaker’s technique. At times she seems visibly disturbed by the questions and the camera focused on her. When she is moved to tears, the zoom effect seems exploitative of her emotional state. And, at the end of the film, she starts in a political discussion with Coutinho, stating that the same problems and needs exist in the

⁹⁰⁸ Secretária da Segurança Pública – Pernambuco. Prontuário Funcionário: Rede Ferroviária do Nordeste, no. 448. Relatório. “Rede Ferroviária Federal S/A. Subcomissão de processo sumário de investigações” No.0278B, 93. DOPS-PE. Recife.

⁹⁰⁹ Secretária da Segurança Pública – Pernambuco. Prontuário Funcionário: Rede Ferroviária do Nordeste, no. 448. Relatório. “Rede Ferroviária Federal S/A. Subcomissão de processo sumário de investigações” No.0278B, 97. DOPS-PE. Recife.

Northeast as they did in 1964: hunger, exploitation, the need to organize. But, what is unclear about this scene is if Elizabeth knew she was being filmed. In other interviews on camera, she chooses not to speak of politics but in the final scene, the camera appears to be hidden. We can only see glimpses of her, as if the camera was poking through bags and around people to record her statement clandestinely. It is not clear if this is an effect or actually a hidden camera.

While the documentary is a history of the Ligas according to Eduardo Coutinho and Elizabeth Teixeira, it also served to denounce the military dictatorship. Elizabeth's story related a powerful message about the memories of the struggle for land before 1964, the destruction of the Nordestino family by the dictatorship, the resilience and strength of Nordestinos to survive and remain committed to their political beliefs, and suggests the possibility of reuniting the family. The footage of Elizabeth in the film portrays her as being first and foremost a mother. Most of the scenes in the 1964 footage depict her surrounded by her children, engaged in typical maternal activities. Then, we see her living alone in the 1980s, known as Dona Marta, working with school children and surrounded by women in the Rio Grande do Norte town, washing clothes in the river; all scenes that portray Elizabeth as part of the feminine Northeastern world. Yet, this mother and wife was a militant Ligas leader who ran for state deputy, roles that contradict the traditional view of the woman of the Northeast.⁹¹⁰

⁹¹⁰ Contrary to the portrayal of Elizabeth in *Cabra marcado*, Assis Lemos remembered that she had very little leadership in the Ligas after the death of her husband. He portrayed her campaign for deputy as being a political tactic and manipulation by Julião. Even though he saw her as an extraordinary woman, he said that after her husband's death, she only took care of her 11 children. But she became

However, the metaphor of the family being torn apart or dismembered by the military dictatorship works well because of this portrayal of Elizabeth as a traditional mother and female figure. The coup forced her into hiding and forced her to protect herself and her children by abandoning them. Coutinho tracks down her children and interviews them about their memories and experiences. Most left the Northeast for São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The son who received a scholarship to stay in Cuba after the coup was in medical school was portrayed as the only child who received an education. The eldest daughter committed suicide with arsenic and another son was killed. Most of the children had no memory of their mother or father. The contrast between the 1960s version of the Teixeira's as heroes, martyrs and militant leaders and the erasure of this experience that had occurred in the years of the dictatorship appears in the stories of the children. They survived but most seemed to be living on the margins of the big cities in the south, lacking any idea of the role their parents had played as major peasant leaders in the 1960s.

The documentary was a powerful means to remember a certain version of the history of the Ligas and João Pedro and Elizabeth. *Cabra marcado* was popular throughout Brazil and created a stir in the cultural critics and intellectual community in Brazil. The testimonies and memoirs of other Ligas leaders provide an analytical tool to understand the narrative the documentary created and how it is only one part of the story of the Ligas and the rural social movements. But the film also addresses the history and memory of two separate groups: one, the “female” experience and

a symbol of rebellion in Paraíba because she was in fact a simple woman without education who was seen as dedicating herself to defending peasants. Assis Lemos de Souza, depoimento. (FGV-CPDOC), 177.

how Elizabeth's story in the documentary forms a part of a broader narrative of Northeastern female political activists; the other, the story of the Ligas in Sapé. The next two sections analyze oral histories with Northeastern women who were political leaders and with a large landowner and Ligas leader from Sapé to contextualize the narrative put forth in *Cabra marcado para morrer*.

A Return to Northeastern Politics with New Voices: Women and Paraíba

To contextualize the experience of Elizabeth Teixeira, I refer to a number of oral histories conducted with women who were involved in a variety of political movements in Northeastern Brazil from the 1950s to the 1980s, and conducted with key figures in Sapé, Paraíba. The fact that women and rural Paraíbaans were interviewed by research organizations in the early 1980s must be seen as related to the film, *Cabra marcado*, but also as a part of the changing scholarly and political interest in locating such voices. An interest in women's roles in politics and social movements and an interest in local history influenced the decision of researchers to conduct oral history interviews with people whose roles had not been well documented in the 1950s and 1960s.

Women's Experiences and Memories

While it is impossible to argue for a generalized Northeastern "female" experience, what the oral histories with five female political activists suggest is that female political leaders – regardless of their political affiliation – couched their participation

in politics as orientated by their roles as mothers and wives. While this type of identification is not particular to Northeastern Brazil, an analysis of their use of the discourse deserves attention to show how female political leaders in Northeastern Brazil chose to describe their involvement in politics.⁹¹¹ In other words, the identity of “mother and wife” holds a symbolic power as illustrated by the depiction of Elizabeth Teixeira in *Cabra marcado para morrer*. Read in the context of the military regime’s appropriation of the discourse of “protecting” the national family, these women – both on the left and the right – legitimized their role in national politics through their identities as mothers and wives. At the same time, on both the right and the left, women’s involvement in politics was often portrayed as a way to stimulate men into being “real men,” to participate in social and political movements to protect their wives and families.⁹¹²

⁹¹¹ For instance, in Daniel James’s *Doña Maria’s Story*, Maria Roldan – a meatpackers’ union leader and Peronista – consistently described the reasons for her political activity in terms of being a good mother and wife. Maria Roldan described her political activity in terms of her female virtues, and the nurturing role in the home taken as a metaphor as the guardians of the nation. Daniel James, *Doña María’s Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

⁹¹² The issue of women being depicted as starting their own political movements because the men were not can be read as a way to question the masculinity of “third world” men. Modernization theory, for instance, portrayed the difference between “modern” and “traditional” men as having to do with modern man’s belief in protecting his wife and family, or the “weaker” members of society. Alex Inkeles and David H. Smith, *Becoming Modern: Individual Change in Six Developing Countries* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 17-25. While this is taken from a 1974 book, Inkeles earlier work (1964) drew similar if not the same conclusions. Cited in: Alvin Y. So, *Social Development and Change: Modernization, Dependency, and World-System Theories* (London: Sage Publications, 1990), pp. 41-43.

The overlap between Modernization theory and scientific racism in this case is particularly strong. According to Positivist thought, the less developed “races” had little distinction between male and female roles unlike the more developed races that divided men and women into separate, unequal spheres.

While some of these women – such as Elizabeth Teixeira – played major roles in political movements and organizations, their participation was almost absent from the sources produced in the 1950s and 1960s. But, by the early 1980s, researchers and filmmakers looked to these female leaders to narrate the experiences of the pre and post coup periods. This change reflects a rise in women's social movements and feminist movements throughout the 1970s and 1980s, but similar to the case of the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, it also illustrates the power that women held as mothers to challenge the rule of the military because of the discourse of the family. Other than Elizabeth, the women interviewed were all middle-upper class women. In this section, I analyze testimonies of women involved with the Ligas, with the PCB and with the right-wing Cruzada Democrática Feminina de Pernambuco, showing how these women narrated their own histories and political involvement.

Naíde Regueira Teodósio worked for the Serviço Social Contra o Mocambo for Miguel Arraes in the Centros Educativos.⁹¹³ She considered herself affiliated with the Communist Party (PCB), although she never had an official membership or participated in their meetings.⁹¹⁴ She was also Vice-President of the Federação de Mulheres do Brasil, led by Branca de Almeida and Ida Marina Rego, a woman's organization loosely affiliated with the PCB that was shut down by the police in the

⁹¹³ These were free centers for health and educational services for workers and maids. According to Naíde, there were 14 Centros with over 200 members in Recife.

⁹¹⁴ Naíde Regueira Teodósio, depoimento. Interviewed by Dulce Chaves Pandolfi, Rio de Janeiro, 01- 15 July 1991. (Rio de Janeiro: FGV/CPDOC – História Oral, 2000). **not transcribed, 11 cassettes**

1950s.⁹¹⁵ The Women's Federation focused on the role of women in Brazilian society and the participation in social life.⁹¹⁶ In her opinion, the coup took place because the hegemony of the latifundiários and the national bourgeoisie was being threatened.⁹¹⁷

She was arrested in mid-April 1964 and imprisoned for seven months, accused of instigating class struggle in Pernambuco. She described being arrested along with her husband in front of her children and taken to DOPS. Although she claimed that people who were arrested the following years of the dictatorship were treated much worse, Naíde was subjected to the fear that she would not leave DOPS alive, and subjected to false executions. But, at the same time, in this first arrest, she met with some policemen who seemed ill prepared as torturers and interrogators. For instance, because she was maintained a sense of calm, one of her interrogators asked her to rub her eyes with an onion so that she appeared to be suffering.⁹¹⁸ But, she also claimed that the treatment at the Casa de Detenção was much worse than at DOPS. She described the fear she felt during four days she spent at Casa de Detenção, where a “King-Kong” figure threatened to torture her to death. She was held in a small room without beds with seven other women, all political prisoners. After seven months in prison, she was released and worked for three months, only to be arrested on 31

⁹¹⁵ According to Naíde, the Women's Federation was different from the Liga Feminista in that the Liga saw women as equal to men, having equal rights, and Naíde found this very superficial because she did not think the problem was about women and men but about class struggle. *Ibid.*

⁹¹⁶ In the PCB-PE newspaper, *Jornal dos Bancários*, this view of the role of women in society was also emphasized, often depicting fashion and cooking.

⁹¹⁷ Naíde Regueira Teodósio, depoimento. Interviewed by Eliane Moury Fernandes and Fátima Quintas. Recife, 27 October 1983. (Recife: Fundação Joaquim Nabuco-CEHIBRA), 19.

⁹¹⁸ Teodósio, depoimento. (FGV/CPDOC).

March 1965, and imprisoned again for another five months. Upon this release, she fled to Rio to escape further persecution. She claimed that “aprendi muito com a prisão, a conhecer melhor o ser humano, com toda sua grandeza e sua miséria.”⁹¹⁹ It gave her a new sense of strength, supposedly, in that she did not want to give herself like a sheep to the military, to be killed like they kill sheep in the interior. And she felt frustrated that no one reacted or protested the arrests and the military coup.⁹²⁰

Naíde had little contact with the Ligas Camponesas, but she her opinion was that they needed to have a more “realistic” approach for changing the situation in the countryside.⁹²¹ While in prison, she shared a cell for a time with a young woman who had been in the Ligas Camponesas, and the conversations they shared helped shape her opinions about the Ligas. The woman had been arrested in Rio and suffered tortures while in prison at Bangu. Naíde thought the Ligas were a positive step in organizing the rural workers but that they fought too much against Arraes instead of supporting his government.⁹²² She believed that Julião held a great capacity for communicating with rural people but that he disappointed everyone after 1964.

Dr. Yara Lúcia Brayner Mattos had closer contact with Francisco Julião and the Ligas Camponesas as an elected leader of the UNE in the early 1960s, and later became the first and only woman elected to the Direção Nacional do Partido (PCB).

⁹¹⁹ Teodósio, depoimento. (Fundação Joaquim Nabuco – CEHIBRA), 22.

⁹²⁰ She returned to Recife in 1967 and worked as a professor even though she faced a “cassão branca,” and found her house had been completely robbed by the military. Her two sons participated in the resistance against the dictatorship, and were both arrested in 1973 and taken to DOPS where they suffered torture. She contacted newspapers throughout the world, and had one account published in France about the torture of her son. Teodósio, depoimento, (FGV/CPDOC).

⁹²¹ Teodósio, depoimento. (Fundação Joaquim Nabuco – CEHIBRA), 12.

⁹²² Teodósio, depoimento, (FGV/CPDOC).

In the early 1960s, she worked for the MCP, specifically in the Adult Literacy Project in Palmares, leading the team that went to work on the engenhos from January to March of 1964.⁹²³ She worked directly with Gregório Bezerra and all the peasant leaders of the region, organizing a large protest on 13 March 1964 in Palmares. She saw Julião as a “figura legendária,” and the movement as something idyllic, romantic, and naïve.⁹²⁴ When she went to live with the peasants on the engenhos, she realized the precariousness of the entire struggle because of the state of misery and poverty. She claimed that everyone knew the phrase, “Cuba sim, Ianque não,” but the poor peasant did not know where Cuba was or who was a Ianque. She remembered Miguel Arraes as being a “father-like” figure for the peasants, and through labor laws and wage regulations, suddenly the peasant had enough money to buy a bicycle or a battery-operated radio.⁹²⁵

After the coup, Yara hid in a house of religious people who asked her to leave because of their fear of harboring political prisoners, and she was arrested a few days later. She described the first days as facing psychological torture: She was brought to a deserted place and the soldiers held a knife to her neck.⁹²⁶ She was released, with help from her father who she described as a “reactionary.” According to Yara’s interview, her husband Mário Mattos died in the early years of the dictatorship, and afterwards she resumed her political work. From 1965 to 1966, she worked for COOPERARTE, an educational assistance program run by usineiros and the Church,

⁹²³ Dr. Yara Lúcia Brayner Mattos. Interviewed by Eliane Moury Fernandes, São Paulo 27 October 1986 (Recife: Fundação Joaquim Nabuco – CEHIBRA), 7.

⁹²⁴ Ibid., 10.

⁹²⁵ Ibid., 14.

⁹²⁶ Ibid., 23.

but it was shut down. Yara traveled to Rio for a meeting and was arrested there in 1969 and spent one year in the DOPS prison, supposedly facing many sessions of physical torture.⁹²⁷ She was accused of being a “pombo correio,” of making connections between the Northeast and the South.⁹²⁸

Anatailde de Paula Crêspo, the daughter of Francisco Julião and Alexina Crespo, was a teenager in the early 1960s. Anatailde spent 18 years in exile, living in Cuba, Chile and Sweden and she described herself as always being politically involved in campaigns against dictatorships and imperialism.⁹²⁹ For instance, when Salvador Allende was President of Chile, Anatailde moved from Cuba to Chile and was arrested after the 1973 coup and sent to the National Stadium. As a teenager, she and her two brothers and one sister went to Cuba after Julião and Alexina decided the death threats they received endangered their children’s lives. In a brief testimony published in 2004, Anatailde described her memories of the experience of the Ligas. She emphasized the fact that her mother and father were both militant leaders of the Ligas, while also describing the gendered difference in their militant duties. She remembered her house always being “cheia de camponeses aos quais minha mãe servia refeições e em cujos corpos tratava ferimentos causados pela violência de latifundiários e jagunços; meu pai atendendo a todos com seu saber jurídico e políticoe com alguma ajuda material.”⁹³⁰

⁹²⁷ Ibid., 28.

⁹²⁸ Ibid., 29.

⁹²⁹ “Depoimento: Anatailde de Paula Crespo,” *Na trilha do golpe: 1964 revisitado*, eds. Túlio Velho Barreto and Laurindo Ferreira (Recife: Fundação Joaquim Nabuco, Editora Massangana, 2004), 98.

⁹³⁰ Ibid., 97.

Even though her parents were both involved in the Ligas, her memories of their involvement in the social movement divides their leadership into more typical gender roles with her mother feeding and caring for the peasants' health concerns and her father providing legal advice and financial resources. Her 2004 testimony also reflects the metaphor of how the military dictatorship in Brazil broke up the family, describing the separation of her entire family during the dictatorship, a "diaspora familiar," in which she was unable to see her father and sister for about 10 years.⁹³¹ Yet, she survived, and her testimony reiterates the Northeastern narrative of years of suffering and survival. She ended the testimony with a quote from a letter she had received from Julião after being released from prison in Chile: "O importante é sobreviver com dignidade."⁹³²

Alexina Crespo, Julião's first wife, was interviewed in 2004 about her role in the Ligas. While she described herself in the first part of the interview as a "traditional" and "simple" mother and wife, she depicted herself as a militant *guerrilleira* in the second part of the interview. For instance, she remembered being Julião's assistant, taking notes on the peasants who arrived at their house and their reasons for seeking legal assistance. She met Julião because he was her professor, and had four children at a young age.⁹³³ She also was asked to give medical care to those who "could not go to the hospital," even though she was not a doctor or a

⁹³¹ Ibid., 98.

⁹³² Ibid., 99.

⁹³³ Her oldest daughter, Anatailde, gave birth to her first child while in Cuba, making Alexina a grandmother at 34 and her son, Anacleto, had his first child when he was 14 years old.

nurse.⁹³⁴ She explained that she did this to help her husband and that the job required her assistance, “not any maid.” She described herself as having always been politically conscious and involved, but she said that she was not a “Maria Quitéria, Anita Garibaldi. Eu fui e sou uma mulher muito simples. Eu não me considero nada assim extraordinário.”⁹³⁵

At the same time, Alexina lived in the Soviet Union for a month with her children, as well as Cuba, Korea and Czechoslovakia and she met Mao-Tse-Tung, Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, and she supposedly was prepared to fight in the luta armada, writing pamphlets for the illiterate peasants, but the conditions did not make guerrilla warfare a feasible option.⁹³⁶ When Alexina returned to Northeastern Brazil from one trip to Cuba in 1963, she discovered that Julião had a new “companheira” who was pregnant. The way that she described her response illustrates perhaps a rejection of the “traditional” female role: Supposedly, her mother told her, crying, that Julião was with a new woman and Alexina recalled replying: “Se ele optou por outra companheira, é porque ele não me quer mais. Eu vou ficar atrás dando escândolo? Deixe ele viver a vida ele.”⁹³⁷ What is interesting about this recollection is that she positioned herself as rejecting the reaction of her mother – the feeling of not knowing what to do and crying – and portrayed herself as independent, strong, and perhaps even more active as a militant after the separation.

Even though she no longer lived with Julião, she continued to be active in the Ligas and recalled organizing a cinema to make money for the Ligas. She also went

⁹³⁴ Ibid., 162-163.

⁹³⁵ Ibid., 164-165.

⁹³⁶ Ibid., 165-168.

⁹³⁷ Ibid., 168-169.

undercover in 1963, traveling to bring money to the guerrilla training camps in Goiás and worked in Goiás with Clodomir de Moraes, allegedly making bombs.⁹³⁸ She participated in guerrilla training in Cuba, learning how to use all different types of weapons (bazooka, mortar, machine gun) and receiving a clandestine name (nom de guerre), “Maria.”⁹³⁹ And she recalled the caches of weapons hidden in Rio, and a number of attempts at bombing certain areas of Rio.⁹⁴⁰ At the time of the coup, Alexina was in Cuba working for the magazine, *Mulheres*, which spoke about women in struggles.⁹⁴¹ She spent the years of the dictatorship working with exiled communities in Europe.

On the political right, Ângela de Araújo Barreto Campello was one of the leaders of the Cruzada Democrática Feminina de Pernambuco, who said she felt relief when the military coup occurred on 31 March 1964. In an interview in 1985, she reflected, “we always believed in the Armed Forces in Brazil...in the way that they were the guardians of order and who, always and at that time, defended the national integrity.”⁹⁴² According to Ângela, the early 1960s had been a time of permanent revolution and real panic, especially for those who liked order and governmental stability.⁹⁴³ She claimed that Julião and the Ligas only were interested in destroying things and did nothing for the rural worker; they only set cane fires and rebelled.⁹⁴⁴

⁹³⁸ She described the bomb preparation in great detail in the interview. Ibid., 172.

⁹³⁹ Ibid., 169-170.

⁹⁴⁰ Ibid., 171-173.

⁹⁴¹ Ibid., 169.

⁹⁴² Ângela de Araújo Barreto Campello, depoimento. Interviewed by Eliane Moury Fernandes and Constaça Sá, Recife, 1 June 1985. (Recife: Fundação Joaquim Nabuco – CEHIBRA), 14

⁹⁴³ Ibid., 4

⁹⁴⁴ Ibid., 6.

Likewise, she thought that the adult education programs were necessary in Pernambuco, but that Paulo Freire only wanted to make the rural population rebel.⁹⁴⁵ As a part of the Cruzada, she worked with Padre Melo in Cabo and her brother was an agronomist who worked closely with Padre Crespo. She believed that both priests had nothing to do with Socialism or Communism; they were dedicated to solving the problem of poverty in the Northeast.⁹⁴⁶ The March of the Family with God, according to Ângela, was a spontaneous rebellion of women who were not satisfied with the state of things in the early 1960s.⁹⁴⁷ As for the military dictatorship, Ângela claimed that they made many magnificent things happen, even though they had a few shortcomings.⁹⁴⁸ When asked about torture, Ângela claimed “it is a very delicate thing because we can only say there was torture if we saw it happen. We can only say that there were excesses when we see those excesses.”⁹⁴⁹

Maria do Carmo Barreto Campello de Melo was one of the founders of the Cruzada Democrática Feminina and has won a number of literary prizes for her poetry.⁹⁵⁰ She described her political engagement as starting after she was injured along with her sisters while participating in a meeting that was attacked by pro-Arraes protesters. When she heard an advertisement on the radio in 1964 that called all women who were against the *status quo* to meet at the Colégio São José, she decided

⁹⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁶ Ibid., 11-13.

⁹⁴⁷ Ibid., 7-8.

⁹⁴⁸ Her understanding of the shortcomings is that every government in the world has shortcomings and the military government was no exception. Ibid., 19.

⁹⁴⁹ Ibid., 15.

⁹⁵⁰ “Entrevista: Maria do Carmo Barreto Campello de Melo,” *Vencedores e vencidos: O movimento de 1964 em Pernambuco*, eds. Manuel Correia de Andrade and Eliane Moury Fernandes (Recife: Fundação Joaquim Nabuco, Editora Massangana, 2004).

to attend and was relieved to find many women who shared her political beliefs, and participated in the improvised march.⁹⁵¹ She explained her reason for participating,

“Porque eu quero meu país para nós, brasileiros. Eu quero Pernambuco para os pernambucanos e cada Estado para o seu Estado e todos nós dentro de um Brasil maior. Eu não aceitava essa intromissão de doutrinas exóticas, doutrinas que não correspondiam à nossa tradição e aos nossos anseios. Então, pegamos uma bandeira de Pernambuco e desfilamos pela Conde de Boa Vista...nós pedimos a ajuda das Forças Armadas para que o país não fosse entregue assim, a idéias estrangeiras, a idéias completamente diferente do nosso pensamento.”⁹⁵²

Maria do Carmo supported the coup, describing it as “a necessary surgery that had to take place at that precise moment so that the sick later could heal and not turn into a chronic illness.”⁹⁵³ In virtually the same words as Angela, Maria do Carmo expressed that she was relieved when the military took power, seeing it as the only way that Brazil could have escaped from turning into a “totalitarian” regime.⁹⁵⁴ After the coup, she described the Cruzada as being the “consciousness” of the military regime: helping those who suffered from social injustices, going into the cane fields and rural areas and working with the poor.⁹⁵⁵

While the women were involved in different – often competing – political movements, their narratives all emphasize their identity as mother and wives, and

⁹⁵¹ While most of the testimonies claim that the march was spontaneous and unplanned, when the women arrived at the IV Army headquarters, Gilberto Freyre and other politicians gave public speeches, which calls its “spontaneity” into question. As Maria do Carmo claimed, “foi uma coisa espontânea, bonita, só de mulheres, carregando a bandeira de Pernambuco e pedindo mundaças.” The repeated claims by female participants about its spontaneity may have been a way to frame the march as legitimate, a “natural” response and plea for the restitution of order by women and mothers. Ibid., 39.

⁹⁵² Ibid., 36-37.

⁹⁵³ Ibid., 43.

⁹⁵⁴ Ibid., 45.

⁹⁵⁵ Ibid., 34, 46-47.

employ the metaphor of the family to describe their experiences. While the meaning of motherhood and the family differed in each case, as in the case of Elizabeth, this discourse was available to describe and legitimize their role in politics and their experiences during the dictatorship. Before concluding the chapter, I analyze the memories of two competing political leaders in the municipality of Sapé, the area where Elizabeth and João Pedro led the Ligas. This final section shows how Elizabeth (and Coutinho's) narrative of the Ligas of Sapé was one narrative in a field of many different memories about the struggle for land in Sapé.

Sapé: A Landowner and a Ligas Leader

Elizabeth and João Pedro Teixeira had been Ligas leaders in the area of Sapé, Paraíba, which grew to become the largest Liga in Brazil with anywhere from 6,000 to 12,000 associates. While there were some sugar cane plantations, Sapé was relatively diverse in terms of agricultural production with small landowners producing potatoes, beans, yucca, and pineapple. The Liga combined rural workers from numerous engenhos in the area (although other municipalities in the area also had strong Ligas), and the popularity of the Liga as well as the repression by the landowners led to an escalation of local violence, such as the assassination of João Pedro in 1962. The landowners had formed their own association shortly after the establishment of the Ligas, LILA (Ligas dos Latifundiários), and a number of peasants and Ligas leaders were assassinated in the early 1960s. The story of the assassination of João Pedro was reported nationally and internationally and supposedly drew attention to Sapé as being the center of the rural movement in

Brazil. When Coutinho and the film crew of *Cabra marcado* decided to re-enact the story of the Liga of Sapé and João Pedro's death, they decided to move the film location to the Engenho Galiléia because of the unrest in the region of Sapé. While the original film was the story of Sapé, the 1983 documentary focused on the rural workers from Galiléia and Elizabeth and her family. To contextualize the history and Elizabeth's experience apart from the film experience, I analyze two oral histories who lived in the area of Sapé in the 1950s and 1960s: a large landowner and a rural social movement leader.

Sabiniano Alves do Rego Maia was a rural landowner who owned multiple properties in Pernambuco and in Sapé, Paraíba, started the Associação dos Proprietários Rurais da Paraíba in 1962, and was the President of the ARENA party from 1972-1975. Sabiniano had direct contact with the Ligas and remembered them as problematic because the Ligas insisted that the rural workers could stay on the property even if they did not pay rent and did not work, which took all the power away from the landowner.⁹⁵⁶ Supposedly, he had three properties in Paraíba and the Ligas kicked him off of one of his properties, threatening that if he returned, they would kill him with a scythe.⁹⁵⁷ This threat of violence he remembered as being commonplace in Sapé in the early 1960s, with many small landowners and rural workers threatening to slit people's necks if they interfered with the Ligas.⁹⁵⁸ He claimed to have no protection, declaring that at the time, they were living in an

⁹⁵⁶ Sabiniano Alves do Rego Maia, depoimento. Depoimento. Interviewed by Maria Antonia Alonso de Andrade and Humberto Mello. João Pessoa, 16-19 March 1981. (Rio, FGV/CPDOC- História Oral, 1985), 71.

⁹⁵⁷ Ibid., 73.

⁹⁵⁸ Ibid., 75.

“anarchist” regime led by João Goulart. He stated that Francisco Julião had created a lot of misery in Pernambuco with the Ligas and that the Paraíba politicians had supported the Ligas. When asked about this, he referred to a story about how the mother of Che Guevara had been a guest in Paraíba in the governor’s palace.⁹⁵⁹

After 1964, he returned to his property that had been seized by the rural workers. He told of how he explained to those who stayed that he was the property owner and they could stay or leave. The leaders of the Sapé Ligas had disappeared after the coup, later found dead on the side of the road, but Sabiniano claimed to know nothing about who was responsible for their deaths. Sabiniano declared himself a supporter of agrarian reform, but not the way the pre-1964 government wanted to execute such a project. He referred to himself as a poor Nordesteño, who only owned 3,000 hectares of land, which was nothing for the large landowners in the south. His argument followed the reasoning of the Nordesteño victim: the property owners of the South were also the federal politicians asking for land reform in the Northeast.⁹⁶⁰ He also claimed that life for the rural worker improved greatly after 1964 with new health projects and rural credit made available.

Ivã Figueiredo participated in the Ligas and was a vereador of Sapé, a small landowner and businessman and was affiliated with the PSD. According to Joaquim Ferreira Filho, he became involved in the Ligas because he was a PSDista, a party in Sapé that was the opposition to the UDN, associated with the usineiros.⁹⁶¹ Assis Lemos described Ivã as having great personal courage because he came from a family

⁹⁵⁹ Ibid., 72.

⁹⁶⁰ Ibid., 84-85.

⁹⁶¹ Ferreira Filho, depoimento. (FGV/CPDOC), 21-22.

that supported the latifundiários and all of his brothers participated in the Liga of Latifundiários. In fact, Pedro Ramos, the large landowner of the engenho Miriri who ordered the assassination of João Pedro Teixeira was married to Ivã's sister.⁹⁶² He traveled to Cuba in 1961 with an invitation from Julião and Ligas leader Pedro Fazendeiro along with about 50 Brazilians, touring the cooperatives, and showing the Brazilians what Cubans had done after the Revolution.⁹⁶³ Upon his return from Cuba, he was imprisoned for 22 days for no apparent reason but was asked many questions about the trip to Cuba.⁹⁶⁴

In a 1978 interview with Eduardo Raposo of the Fundação Getúlio Vargas, Ivã recalled the Ligas and the political struggle in Sapé in the early 1960s. He said that by 1959, the tensions between the large landowners and the rural workers had reached a critical point in which the landowners wanted to turn the agricultural lands into cattle ranches, displacing the rural workers, who then started a Liga. He recalled that Julião had founded the first Liga in Sapé in 1960, with Severino Barbosa (small landowner) as president and João Pedro Teixeira as Vice-president.⁹⁶⁵ He remembered the conflicts that had started in the Liga of Sapé between Assis Lemos and Julião and how Elizabeth had approached him, looking for electoral support but he had said that he supported Assis Lemos.⁹⁶⁶ He depicted Julião as starting the Ligas but then Assis Lemos, from Paraíba, as being more influential as the Liga grew, but

⁹⁶² Assis Lemos de Souza, depoimento. (FGV-CPDOC), 51.

⁹⁶³ Ivã Figueiredo, depoimento. Interviewed by Eduardo Raposo and José Otávio in Sapé, February 1978 and January 1979. (Rio: FGV/CPDOC-História Oral, 1985), 25-26.

⁹⁶⁴ Ibid., 28.

⁹⁶⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁹⁶⁶ Ibid., 13-14.

the divisions were arbitrary to some extent. Many of the Ligas leaders supported both Assis Lemos and Julião.⁹⁶⁷

Ivã remembered the incidents of violence in the area as escalating after 1962. He recalled the landowners being well armed with rifles and machine guns and said that the peasants never had guns: They were only armed with knives, machetes, and hoes.⁹⁶⁸ He said that Julião instigated the violent response to the numerous assassinations of Ligas leaders, whereas Assis Lemos preferred a more peaceful strategy of protest. He described the importance of having an identity card of the Ligas, which entitled the rural worker to protection by the lawyers of the Ligas for free.⁹⁶⁹ Contrary to claims made in the 1960s that the Ligas exploited the peasants, Ivã recalled the passbook as being a symbol of belonging to an organization that united peasants and worked to their benefit. He described the monthly payments as being something completely normal because any type of association needs money to function.⁹⁷⁰ And the organization allowed the peasants a greater voice in politics. As he described, the police learned to respect rural workers because they saw that they were outnumbered and the latifundiarios and judges realized that they had to negotiate with the peasants as well.⁹⁷¹

As for the military dictatorship, Ivã described it as only bringing misery to Sapé and creating a sense of resentment in the rural workers of Sapé for the Ligas.⁹⁷² Ivã claimed that after the revolution, the landowners expelled all the rural workers

⁹⁶⁷ Ibid., 16.

⁹⁶⁸ Ibid., 23.

⁹⁶⁹ Montenegro, "*Cabra marcado para morrer*," 64.

⁹⁷⁰ Ibid., 63-65.

⁹⁷¹ Ibid., 65-66.

⁹⁷² Figueiredo, depoimento. (FGV/CPDOC), 24.

from their houses and property, turning them into *bóias-frias*, or day laborers.⁹⁷³ The rural workers congregated in what he defined as a “rural slum” known as Nova Cuba.⁹⁷⁴ With the coup, he said the police came to Sapé and arrested many people, filling the jails, but he escaped to the woods to go into hiding. From there, he eventually escaped to a small town on the border of Rio Grande do Norte, where he continued to be followed by the police, until he crossed a river by swimming, leaving the police on the other side.⁹⁷⁵ Shortly afterwards, he went into internal exile in Rio de Janeiro where he lived for seven or eight years.⁹⁷⁶ He described the violence and the attempts to destroy – or blow up – the memories of the Ligas in Sapé with a poignant anecdote about the tombstone of João Pedro Teixeira that was blown-up with dynamite.⁹⁷⁷

Ivã personally was forced to sell – or as he said donate – his small estate in 1973 out of financial necessity.⁹⁷⁸ Ivã used the example of the planned visit to Sapé by President Kennedy as a way to discuss the skepticism that peasants had for all governmental promises for agrarian reform. He claimed that similar to the JFK administration, the dictatorship had promised an agrarian reform without blood, but had done absolutely nothing other than offer these promises.⁹⁷⁹ He claimed that the rural unions had done nothing for the peasants because they were completely

⁹⁷³ Montenegro, “*Cabra marcado para morrer*,” 43-44.

⁹⁷⁴ Ibid., 45.

⁹⁷⁵ Ibid., 38-39.

⁹⁷⁶ Ibid., 42.

⁹⁷⁷ Ibid., 47.

⁹⁷⁸ Figueiredo, depoimento. (FGV/CPDOC), 3.

⁹⁷⁹ Montenegro, “*Cabra marcado para morrer*,” 32-33.

controlled by the large landowners, and not led by peasants themselves.⁹⁸⁰ He ended the interview by stating that the revolution ended the movement and ended everything.⁹⁸¹

The differences between Ivã Figueiredo's and Sabiano Alves do Rego Maia's testimonies could easily be narrated as the difference of experiences for the poor versus the rich, the peasant versus the rural elite. It is a story of losers and winners, as the edited collection by the Fundação Joaquim Nabuco suggests in its title: *Vencedores e vencidos*.⁹⁸² And, this is a classic narrative of the Northeast: the short-lived struggle of the rural poor ending with violent repression that only serves to empower the rural elite and worsen the misery of the peasant. But what is interesting about both testimonies is the fact that they saw change as occurring in the Northeast, which challenges the dominant deterministic narrative of the Northeast as being immune to change, as forever linked to traditional culture and lifestyle.⁹⁸³ And while

⁹⁸⁰ Ibid., 62.

⁹⁸¹ Ibid., 69.

⁹⁸² *Vencedores e vencidos: O movimento de 1964 em Pernambuco*, eds. Manuel Correia de Andrade and Eliane Moury Fernandes (Recife: Fundação Joaquim Nabuco, Editora Massangana, 2004).

⁹⁸³ A good example of this narrative was published in one of the mainstream newspapers of the Northeast, *O Jornal do Commercio*, in 2003: The perseverance of symbols of Nordeste tragedy--composed of hunger and hope--still make a profound impression. Journalistic stories about the *sertão* reproduce the ancient framework of Euclides da Cunha's account of Canudos...more than a century later. (...) The fact is we remain imprisoned by the ghosts of Pedra Bonita and Canudos. What may seem unimaginable for those who go to shopping malls and for those who have virtual relationships on the internet...is that people continue to live as they lived in Colonial Brazil. Although it seems unlikely, in thousands of towns in the Interior of Pernambuco or in any other Northeastern state, recorded data find shacks made of mud and wood,...wood-burning stoves, water hauled from distant wells, rags and a lingering hope in the grace of God. "Tudo como dantes," *Jornal do Commercio*, 2 August 2003, p.4.

the dictatorship repressed many Nordesteño peasants and tried to suppress the memory of the Ligas – even with the destruction of João Pedro’s grave – the memories carried a ray of hope, even if only in the fact that a strong rural labor movement had once existed and had created solidarity, imbuing the identity of Nordesteño peasant with a sense of power and strength that had taken an overwhelming use of force to disband.

Conclusion

While the trope of tragedy weighs heavily in many of the testimonies as a way to portray the period of the military coup and the dictatorship, ideas of resistance and resilience suggest that the fight for land and for rural people’s rights had not ended in Northeastern Brazil. The intention of this chapter was to show how and if the history of the Ligas was incorporated into the dominant regional narrative. From the oral histories, films, and memoirs produced in the 1980s, it is clear that the experience of the Ligas and of the dictatorship influenced Nordesteño identity. Similar to the narratives of Canudos, the cangaciero, slavery, modernization and poverty, the ways people remembered the rural social movements of the 1950s and 1960s and chose to frame their subjectivity was not fixed or deterministic. While certain themes repeated in many of the memories, the definitions attached to these themes often held different meanings; for instance, the metaphor of the family. The negotiation between the dominant narrative, the oppositional or subaltern narrative, and people’s personal subjectivities exemplifies the fluidity of regional identity in Northeastern Brazil. This multiplicity of identities contrasts with the prevalent notion of Northeastern Brazil as

having an entrenched regional identity based on in historical narratives of inequality and poverty, violence and messianism, sugar production and exploitive labor relations, hunger and drought, and survival and resistance.

One of the places where this regional narrative is most fixed is in popular or mass culture. The issue of representation is a key component to the idea of *Nordestinidade*. As in the case of representations of Canudos, the *cangaceiro*, and slavery, the social movements of the 1960s also were represented in forms of mass communication: film, popular poetry, theater, novels, artwork. The representations in mass communication served to consolidate the history of the Ligas into a singular narrative. Many of the images and narratives reproduced stereotypical notions of the Northeast and the *Nordestino*, facilitating the historicization of the Ligas into a narrative of regional identity. In other words, even though the oral histories suggest a broad range of experiences and political struggles, the existing regional narrative fortified by representations in popular culture narrowed the differences into a master narrative of the Northeast: short-lived political struggle met by violent state repression that created greater suffering along with the determined will to survive.

In this chapter, I examined how Brazilians produced a memory and history of the Ligas Camponesas and the rural social activism before 1964 as well as how these histories were shaped and connected to the experience of the military coup and the regime. Most of the interviews, memoirs and films used in this chapter were produced in the specific historical context of the *abertura* that must be taken into account when analyzing how people remembered the social activism and dictatorship. During this period, the Brazilian military still had control but numerous forces were

mobilized to call for an end to the dictatorship and a return to democracy. Thus, many of the interviews suggest a certain reconciliation between social movements and politicians who seemed to be adversaries in the early 1960s, perhaps in an attempt to create a unified front against the dictatorship.

In a 1997 article, Daniel James expressed his concern about “memory studies,” a concern that is shared by many historians and anthropologists. James began the article with the contention: “Memory, it seems, is everywhere nowadays...we are in the midst of a boom in the academy centered on the production of texts about memory, commemoration, and forgetting.”⁹⁸⁴ While this certainly continues to be a valid criticism of the amorphous study of memory, the categories of memory and forgetting go beyond simply being a part of academia. Memory is a central issue in the present-day Latin America politics. In recent years, the debate has intensified about how to forget, remember, or reconcile the period of the military regimes. The state and certain sectors of the population have fought for the need to forget what happened in the past and they have actively promoted this idea by transforming former torture centers and jails into shopping malls and artisan craft markets, and by claiming that to have progress, Latin America cannot dwell in the past. In other cases, political initiatives have re-opened court trials against military officials or opened the possibility for those who suffered to receive remunerations from the state. And, as often expressed in the testimonies from the Northeast, one of the more common statements is reconciliation: Military officers published memoirs stating their respect for the social movement leaders of the 1950s and 1960s, calling

⁹⁸⁴ Daniel James, “Meatpackers, Peronists, and Collective Memory: A View from the South,” *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (Dec., 1997), 1404.

military leaders the “real criminals” and admitting their implication but also their attempts to humanize the prison experience for the prisoners and lessen the repression.⁹⁸⁵ Political prisoners also left space for the military officers and enlisted men who they met in prison, who showed humanity and who seemed as oppressed as the prisoners, even though they were standing on the other side of the prison bars.

While many recent studies on the Brazilian dictatorship argue that the violent methods of arrests, imprisonment and torture mostly occurred after AI-5, starting in 1968, the experience of the Northeast challenges this argument. Rural people, social movement leaders and Northeastern politicians not only faced arrest, imprisonment and torture, but a number of disappearances also show how this type of repression existed with the onset of the coup. The other issue to consider is the fact that a number of the military leaders were the commanding officers of the IV Exército in the 1960s (Castello Branco, Costa e Silva). Although some scholars have argued that the level of attention – nationally and internationally – that the Northeast received in the 1960s was exaggerated for the degree of “threat” the region posed to “national security,” it is impossible to understand the politics of the democratic period and the dictatorship without taking into consideration the Northeast. The memories in the oral histories and films describe the local experience as well as a more universal story of the Cold War in Latin America.

⁹⁸⁵ Carlito Lima’s testimonio on his experiences as a military officer who “befriended” Francisco Julião, Gregório Bezerra, Miguel Arraes, Paulo Freire and others is a strong example. Lima published his own memoir of the era, perhaps in an attempt to reconcile with the guilt of having served in the military during the dictatorship. He cites many of the other memoirs from these political prisoners, showing his dedication to understanding how he ended up on the side of the military instead of being a political prisoner himself. Lima, *Confissões de um capitão*.

Appendices

Map of Brazil:
Contemporary Northeastern Brazil, Northeastern Brazil until
1970, Polígono das Secas/Sertão



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Ennes Paulo Crespo
Gregório Bezerra
Angela de Araújo Barreto Campello
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